

OVERVIEW OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL PROFESSION

One of the most important things to do before leaving law school is to learn about the wide variety of employment opportunities available to law school graduates. While this section describes several practice settings for attorneys, keep in mind that there are countless ways to utilize your law degree. In addition to the overview in this section, the Office of Professional Development has a variety of resources designed to help you get a better feel for the “ins” and “outs” of the legal profession and beyond.

AN OVERVIEW OF EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

Law Firms

Lawyers who work in the private sector can be found in numerous settings, the most common of the private sector settings being the law firm. Law offices can take on many shapes and sizes ranging from solo practice to small, medium and large. Some firms have multiple locations and even international offices. Due to the fact that it tends to be the larger law firms that interview on campus, there is a distorted sense of the numbers of attorneys who actually practice in the large firm setting. A study conducted in 2004 found that *nearly one third of all licensed attorneys were in solo practice*. The other two-thirds of lawyers in private practice work in law firms.

- **Large Firm Practice:** Large firms are generally defined as those firms having 50 or more attorneys. This varies depending on the region/geographic location. Large firms generally provide the highest starting salaries, the greatest opportunities for specialization, and a steady client base. Large firms are known for their high billable hour requirements of new associates, which translate into long work hours.
 - Most large law firms recruit for summer associates exclusively in the fall. The second year summer associate program is heavily relied on to fill permanent first year associate positions, and often a permanent offer of employment follows a summer spent at a large firm. Large firm recruiting is very competitive; typically large firms are interested in students who are in the top 20% of the class, have outstanding legal research and writing skills, and who have been selected for law review and/or moot court. Detailed information on large and medium firm employers is available through the National Association for Law Placement (NALP) Directory. (www.nalpdirectory.com)
- **Medium Firm Practice:** Medium size law firms can range from firms with 11-20 attorneys or 21-50 depending on the geographic location of the firm and the type of firms in/around it. (What is considered medium in Toledo may be small in Chicago.) Firms in this range are often considered “boutique firms”, which means they have specialized practices.
 - While some medium sized firms are similar to large firms and recruit in the fall, some put off making summer law clerk hiring decisions until the spring. In order

to avoid missing opportunities, it is wise to send letters of inquiry to medium firms in the fall, but to anticipate that they may not be looking to hire summer clerks until the spring. Medium sized firms tend to be a little more flexible on application criteria than large firms, and will recruit deeper in the class, and may even consider hiring outstanding first year law students for summer law clerk positions.

- **Small Firm Practice:** In small firms, a graduate has the opportunity to take on more responsibility for cases and have more client contact early on. However, smaller firms generally have less money for attorney salaries and for support staff, which means you may have to accept a low starting salary and could end up doing a lot of your own typing, copying, and other administrative tasks.
 - Small firms usually cannot predict their hiring needs very far in advance, and tend to hire for summer and for permanent positions on an as-needed basis. The process of finding employment in a small firm is more complicated and unregimented than finding one with a large or medium sized firm. Although some people have had success finding a small firm position through blind mass mailings, a more targeted approach tends to be more fruitful. You can search for small firm employers by city, state, and/or practice area on www.martindale.com.
 - If your ultimate goal is to practice in a smaller community or in a small firm in a larger community, your plans may not be settled as early as some of your classmates. In fact, it may not be until after you've taken and passed the bar that permanent employment plans materialize, and this is not uncommon.

Judicial Clerkships

- Judicial Clerkships are typically one or two-year appointments for new law graduates, although some judges do hire permanent clerks. One who becomes, or seeks to become a judicial clerk, is really preparing for the role of "advisor to the judge", a coveted and respected role throughout the legal community. Judicial Clerkships provide an opportunity for a new lawyer to spend extended time with a judge, and to keep learning the law from the perspective and hand of that judge.
- While it is generally perceived that all judicial clerkships require high academic marks, this is not necessarily the case. Although most federal clerkships are very competitive and require a high GPA, many state courts offer excellent clerkship opportunities without the high GPA requirement. State judicial clerkships application deadlines fall anywhere from the spring of the second year to spring of the third year, while federal clerkship applications are due in September of the third year.
- While the employing judge will determine the specific duties and functions of his or her clerk, law clerks typically will perform legal research, prepare bench memoranda on cases before the judge, draft options, verify citations, communicate with counsel regarding case management and procedural requirements, and assist the judge during

courtroom proceedings. As you may begin to understand, many law clerks find that the prestige and experience associated with service as a law clerk greatly increases one's future employment opportunities. For example, many law firms will grant second-year status to incoming associates who have completed a clerkship and will defer a grad's start date to allow for the one or two-year clerkship.

- For more information on employment opportunities and careers, check out the Judicial Clerkship section of the Office of Professional Development web page at: <http://www.utlaw.edu/students/career/clerkships.htm>

Government

Opportunities for employment are available at every level of government from local to national. As the size of the government continues to grow, so does the likelihood that positions for lawyers to work with and represent governmental entities such as school districts, cities, counties, states, services and the federal government itself will continue to be available.

- Federal Government: The federal government hires lawyers for a variety of tasks in numerous agencies and departments and offers career opportunities in a broad range of specialty fields. The Department of Justice (DOJ) is the largest federal employer of attorneys. Representative of other federal agencies, the DOJ has a well developed Summer Law Intern Program (SLIP) for second year students and a Legal Intern Program for first year law students. The Attorney General Honors Program is the DOJ's recruitment program for entry level attorneys and is the only way the Department hires graduating law students. Recruitment for this program is extremely competitive and takes place during the early fall of the third year. Deadlines for other Federal agencies occur from early fall through early spring. For more information, please visit the Office of Professional Development to secure a password for the Government Honors and Internships Handbook. (<http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm>) Another popular resource is the www.usajobs.gov website.
- State & Local Government: State government opportunities vary. Each of the fifty states maintains a staff under its Attorney General to litigate suits for and against the state; this is often the largest legal office at the state level. Non-legal positions may exist within many state agencies for which a law degree is helpful but not required. Local government units will have a city attorney and a larger city may have a department instead of just one attorney to take on all the work. On the web, www.Ohio.gov and www.Michigan.gov are good resources.
- Public defender and prosecutor offices are usually good places for new law school grads to find employment. Public defender offices provide representation to accused persons in criminal cases who are financially unable to retain their own lawyer. On the other hand, the prosecutor's office handles criminal cases but represents the state (or "the people") in these matters. Caseloads tend to be high in this area, which provides a unique opportunity for young lawyers to get great experience. Review <http://www.michiganprosecutor.org/jobs.htm> and <http://www.ohiopa.org/job.htm> .

Public Interest Organizations

- Legal opportunities in public service can be found in a variety of legal settings and practice areas. There are two general types of public interest employers, those that are issue-oriented and those that are client-oriented. Each has a different focus and conduct business accordingly.
- Issue-oriented groups take on cases with the intention of creating legal policy and precedents that will affect large numbers of people. Related legal employment areas that may come into play include: lobbying, grassroots organizing and community-based education. Examples of such organizations include Sierra Club Legal Defense Fund, Amnesty International and locally, Advocates for Basic Legal Equality (ABLE).
- Client-oriented organizations focus on providing direct legal aid to those that belong to under-represented groups or are poor. These practice areas may include: family law, consumer law and public health. Examples of client-oriented employers are: Michigan Migrant Legal Assistance Project and here locally, Legal Aid of Western Ohio (LAWO). On the web, review www.idealists.org.
- In order to educate yourself on the variety of opportunities available, it is strongly suggested that you visit www.pslawnet.org, a public-interest posting site available to University of Toledo College of Law students and alumni. The Equal Justice Works website is also a valuable public interest law resource. www.equaljusticeworks.org

Business

- Corporations, banks, accounting firms, insurance companies, publishing companies and consulting groups are all businesses that employ lawyers. In addition, libraries, hospitals, colleges, school systems and a host of other entities rely on attorneys as well.
- In years past, corporations did not have large legal departments and rarely sought new grads to fill any vacancies. Recently, businesses have been increasing the size of their in-house staff, but it remains rare for entry-level attorneys to be hired for an in-house position. Unlike law firm attorneys, in-house attorneys work with only one client and generally cover a variety of areas for that one client. On the web, review <http://jobline.acc.com/search/browse/>
- CPA firms also look to lawyers to handle areas such as accounting, auditing, tax planning and management services. Most openings for lawyers will be in the tax departments of the big accounting firms and may require a background in accounting as well as a law degree. Regional accounting firms may also hire attorneys.
- Universities and other educational employers, both public and private, hire attorneys to represent them and manage their corporate affairs. Attorneys can be found in the General Counsel's Office, in the medical center and in areas that deal with intellectual property where patents and trademarks need protecting. Lawyers can also serve in a faculty or administrative role.

- Management Consulting is another area where being an attorney can help you. Firms that specialize in management consulting help top management business, government and other organizations in solving management problems.

Non-Traditional Legal Careers

A law degree is highly valued and is the ticket to any number of successful career paths, both legal and non-legal. Today, there are countless opportunities for attorneys to use the skills they have gained in law school in non-traditional legal career settings.

Finding a fulfilling alternative legal career requires a lot of time, hard work, perseverance, and commitment. Students looking for non-traditional work must be willing to work hard and to prove themselves—even if it means taking an entry level position with their desired employer and working the way up to a “dream job”.

The following list is just a sample of the non-traditional legal career options that can be pursued, there are countless more.

Affirmative Action Officer	Border Patrol Agent
Child Support Enforcement	City Planner
Claims Specialist	Congressional Staff
Contract Administrator	Consumer Advocate
Corporate Affairs Administrator	Court Administrator
Customs Inspector	Development Officer
Employee Relations Specialist	Environmental Affairs Officer
Environmental Compliance Officer	Estate Planner
F.B.I. Agent	Government Affairs Officer
Human Resource Manager	Industrial Relations Officer
Insurance Underwriter or Examiner	Internal Revenue Officer
Law Firm Administrator	Lobbyist
Mediation Specialist	Mergers & Acquisitions Manager
Mortgage Officer	Pension Specialist
Planned Giving Administrator	Probate Administrator
Property Manager	Regulatory Affairs Officer
Risk Manager	Strategic Planner
Tax Specialist	Trust Administrator

If you are thinking about pursuing a non-traditional legal career:

- Begin by analyzing your abilities and assessing the job market for the position.
- Determine how you can best present your skills and achievements in the most positive light for the targeted position.
- Check with Law Career Services in the Office of Professional Development if you would like more information about non-traditional career options.