

## CAREER OPTIONS IN THE LAW

**Large Law Firms.** Large law firms generally have at least 75 attorneys and may have offices in several different locations. Most have many different practice areas. Associates are typically assigned to one practice area, often with limited opportunity to receive assignments from another practice area. Clients tend to be large corporations or other large organizations. The advantage of working at a large firm is a generous paycheck. However, associates are expected to put in long hours. The atmosphere or “personality” of large firms varies tremendously, and, therefore, it is recommended that you research firms before you apply. Large firms tend to rely on their summer associate program for their hiring needs. Entry-level associates are usually former summer associates, however, some do hire a small number of graduating 3Ls. The hiring criteria tends to be very rigid. That is to say, these firms are looking for a high GPA and law journal experience. These firms advertise for positions through the fall on campus recruiting program, job fairs and online job listings.

**Medium & Small Law Firms.** A small law firm can generally range from a solo practice to a firm with 25 attorneys. A medium-sized law firm generally ranges from about 25 attorneys to 75, or so, attorneys. Most small and medium-sized law firms focus on a few practice areas. Associates typically handle assignments from several different practice areas and have greater control over their work than their large firm counterparts. Typically, there are more opportunities for associates to appear in court than at a large firm. Clients can be anyone from your next door neighbor to a corporate entity, depending on the practice areas involved. The atmosphere at these firms tends to be more relaxed and less structured and hierarchical than at large firms. The hours can be less demanding than those required at a large firm. However, this can vary, and even small and medium-sized law firms may require substantial billable hours from their associates. Entry-level associates and summer academic year law clerks are recruited as needed. These firms advertise for positions through online job listings, although many positions may be unadvertised.

**Judicial Clerkships.** A judicial law clerk is an attorney (or a law school graduate) who assists a judge in various legal and administrative tasks. Law clerks generally serve for one year, although there are some exceptions to that rule. Clerkships exist on the following levels: State Trial, State Appellate (including State Supreme Court), Federal Trial (U.S. District Court), Federal Appellate (U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals) and Federal Supreme Court (U.S. Supreme Court). State Appellate and Federal clerkships tend to be more competitive than State Trial clerkships and tend to place a greater emphasis on GPA and law journal experience. However, State Trial clerkships have become increasingly competitive over the past several years. The specific duties of a law clerk vary

depending on the judge and the level of the court. At the trial level, most law clerks research legal issues that come before the Court on motion and write advisory memoranda to the judge. Law clerks on the trial level generally have extensive contact with attorneys and handle a broad range of administrative tasks. Appellate level law clerks research legal issues, prepare bench memoranda, draft opinions, and edit or citecheck opinions. These clerks have limited contact with attorneys. A clerkship, in any court at any level, is an excellent opportunity to learn how the legal system functions and to participate in the system by making real decisions. Many law firms specifically hire former law clerks because of the value a former law clerk brings to a firm.

**Government.** Numerous opportunities for attorneys exist within the Government on the federal, state and local levels.

Federal: Attorneys who work for the federal government work in a broad range of legal and policy positions in the Executive (e.g., the Department of Justice, Department of Labor, the Environmental Protection Agency.) and Legislative (i.e., Capitol Hill) branches of the government. For example, federal government attorneys are involved in administrative, regulatory, and advisory processes, legislative drafting, policy drafting and review, and trial practice at the administrative, trial and appellate levels. In addition, federal government attorneys are involved in civil and criminal law matters. Most entry level attorneys are hired through the Department of Justice Honors Program. The DOJ Honor’s Program is very competitive. While the DOJ does not provide applicants with a GPA minimum or other application requirements, a strong GPA and previous government experience are desired. A list of entry level attorney programs can be found at the DOJ website.

State and Local: Like their federal counterparts, attorneys who work at the state and local levels work in a broad range of legal and policy positions in the Executive and Legislative branches of the government. For example, The N.J. Attorney General’s Office represents various state agencies and departments and handles both civil and criminal matters. On the local level, township/city/county attorneys handle day to day legal matters such as contractual and land use matters. Local prosecutors represent the county/city/state in criminal prosecutions, while public defenders represent criminal defendants in such prosecutions. Most state and local positions are unadvertised, although these agencies occasionally post openings for positions online. It is recommended that interested applicants apply directly to these agencies.

Other Governmental Opportunities: A number of opportunities exist for attorneys in legal and legal related positions at the federal and local government levels. Examples of these positions include: lobbyist, political analyst, investigator, court services supervisor, ethics officer, and permanent (or career)

law clerk. Some of these positions are posted through online job listings, but most are not. Therefore, it is recommended that interested applicants contact individual agencies to learn of openings.

**In-House Counsel.** An in-house attorney is an attorney who works directly for a corporation, business, non-profit organization or other entity. Many in-house attorneys are generalists, working on a variety of different legal matters. Matters requiring litigation generally are handled by outside counsel. An in-house position can be a very attractive option. In-house attorneys do not have billable hour requirements, and the compensation, depending on the employer-organization, can be very generous. However, most in-house positions are filled by attorneys who have several years of experience in private practice (typically at least three to five years). Some corporations with large legal departments may hire new law school graduates, but this is the exception. Occasionally positions are advertised via careers services online job listings. However, most openings are unadvertised.

**Public Interest Law.** Most public interest work is performed in either non-profit, small public interest law firms, or government settings. However, many private sector attorneys undertake public interest work through *pro bono* representations. Substantively, most public interest lawyering is characterized as either direct representation (litigation) or policy/advisory. Typical litigation practice areas include family law, public benefits, consumer law, civil rights, environmental law, housing, asylum and refugee law, homelessness, and criminal defense. Policy-oriented organizations focus primarily on strategies other than litigation. Those organizations may utilize community education, lobbying, policy analysis or amicus brief writing to meet their objectives. Public interest organizations look for a commitment to public interest or a particular cause or concern in their applicants. Students who are interested in public interest work are strongly urged to participate in law school *pro bono* programs. Public interest positions are typically grant funded or scholarship based and may have deadlines up to a year in advance. Positions are advertised online at websites such as PSLawnet, through Job Fairs (PIPS, APIL), and via the Career Services Office's online job listings.

**Academic Options.** Academic opportunities provide attorneys with unique career choices. The Chronicle of Higher Education website is an excellent source of listings for positions.

**Professorships and Research Assistantships:** Law schools seek faculty members with strong recommendations and outstanding grades and experience (i.e., top 10% of the class, published, law review, moot court, and a judicial clerkship, particularly at the federal appellate level). There are relatively few teaching positions available each year and it can be challenging to obtain a position in a preferred geographic location. A less competitive

option is to teach as an adjunct professor at a community college. Students seeking to become professors should seek to maximize or emphasize their legal research and writing experience while in school. A research assistant or teaching assistant position is a good way to develop research, writing and teaching skills. Some professors advertise for these positions via career services' online job listings or with flyers posted throughout the law school building.

**Administration:** Various administrative positions exist on the undergraduate, graduate and law school level. Judicial affairs, legislative affairs, student affairs, career services, and academic support are just a few of the areas in which attorneys work.

**LL.M. and advanced degrees:** An LL.M., or Master of Laws degree, is a postgraduate law degree, usually obtained through a one year program. An LL.M. can be an advantage, but typically only if the LL.M. is from a top school.

### **Non-Legal and Non-Traditional Alternatives.**

There are 40,000 job titles according to the Dictionary of Occupational Titles. Therefore, there are 39,999 alternative jobs to the traditional practice of law as an attorney. Some common alternatives to the practice of law include, but are not limited to: Law Librarian, Human Resources Manager, Legal Technology Consultant, Investigator, Criminologist, Court Administrator, Legislative Assistant, Lobbyist, Ethics Officer, Compliance Specialist, Contract Administrator, Career Counselor and Legal Publishing Professional (i.e., Westlaw, Lexis).