

Ideas for Law Students and Recent Graduates Entering the Real World

When lawyers, judges, and teachers got together at the 20th Anniversary Conclave on the Education of Lawyers in Charlottesville last April (see <http://www.vsb.org/site/members/20th-anniversary-conclave>), they discussed a myriad of issues facing the legal profession. One recurrent issue was the relative lack of job opportunities for the young lawyers that the law schools are turning out. By one estimate, law schools are graduating 45,000 students per year and there are legal jobs available for only 25,000 of them.

With that in mind, *Virginia Lawyer* asked the deans of Virginia's law schools for their thoughts on how students and recent graduates could better prepare themselves for the tight job market.

The deans who responded offered a variety of advice, but it mostly comes down to: be active, don't wait for a job to find you. Though some deans described it with different words, they all highly recommended "networking" as essential—build relationships, participate in local bar associations, do pro bono work, go after internships and externships, concentrate on growth areas. Beyond the general consensus, each of the deans also added their own specific suggestions.

If you're a young lawyer, or soon will be, we hope you will find these ideas useful.

Dean Lucy S. McGough

Appalachian School of Law

Appalachian School of Law (ASL) is a small, independent, energetic law school tucked in the mountains of southwest Virginia. After fifteen years, we have only 1,000 alumnae. Most of our graduates enter private practice with a small firm with two to ten attorneys (50 percent); about 18 percent take on a solo practice. The remainder are scattered among employment in government, business, the public interest, and judicial clerkships. As a result of these data, we focus our curriculum on practicums that simulate processes typical of various areas of substantive law and for the hardy individualists, law office practice for the solo practitioner. We also provide a wide array of resources in our career services office — written materials, panels of experts, individual counseling — which should be taken advantage of by any job-seeker.

There are rooms of literature advising students on how to improve their job search. Here is only a sample of admonitions that appear on nearly every self-help list. Start your search early. Cast the widest possible net, from type of work to geographical location. (At ASL, we have placed students each year in more than eighteen jurisdictions.) Do as many role-plays as possible in advance of an interview. Tailor your cover letter to present your unique features. (I recall hiring a summer associate primarily because his letter revealed he was a college trivia champion; he responded to a question about it and parlayed the experience into a charming and convincing interview.) Offer writing samples and other examples of your professional work that underscore your abilities and enthusiasm for the position.

But aside from what the job seeker can do for herself or himself, we believe that our institution has the obligation to make curricular changes that are most likely to open up additional employment opportunities. We now offer concentrations in growth areas, such as natural resources and energy law and alternative dispute resolution. We offer certificates in both of these areas in order to provide our graduates with greater preparation for specialized practice and therefore, more appealing credentials to an employer who wants

an associate who will require little additional grooming, the so-called “practice ready” attorney.

We also believe that the externship placement, which is required for every ASL graduate, can be a real gateway to a career. During the summer of the first year, every student must complete a 200-hour externship for three hours academic credit. We have placed students in 500 public service offices, agencies and foundations in forty-three states. We spend a great deal of time seeking such opportunities for our students and hope to add fifty more choices this year.

Even though an externship may not be required by every law school for its students, a student should seek to create an externship, internship, or clerkship. For years, the larger law firms have used summer placements to decide among associate candidates. Though shocking to many parents, today many businesses and some government agencies offer only unpaid summer or in-term externships; job seekers may be well advised to borrow money, if necessary, to take

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advantage of an appealing externship opportunity. Few credentials are as impressive to an employer as a positive professional track record developed face-to-face by the candidate with staff and supervisors in the employer’s own “backyard.”

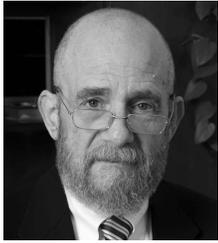
In sum, we advise our students to analyze what sort of practice they find most appealing and then tailor their course and externship choices here to optimize their readiness for a specialty or to broaden their preparation for general practice. With the current professional life expectancy of fifty years, we think helping our graduates finding the right niche is a one of the most important “jobs” we do.



Dean Lucy S. McGough

Dean Daniel D. Polsby

George Mason University School of Law



Dean Daniel D. Polsby

What does George Mason see as areas of law offering “the best job prospects for new lawyers?” Centering a job search on a projected hot practice area can send one on a wild goose chase. Will a certain practice area be hot when you graduate? Is the work in that area commonly done by one type of employer that may or may not be hiring? Is this type of work prevalent in the city to which you are headed? Does your skill set match the skills of successful attorneys working in that area?

In the D.C. market, JDs with litigation and regulatory experience have an edge. In our experience, employers always seek law students with science and technical backgrounds for intellectual property work. While students with these backgrounds should consider this obvious advantage, they should not do so at the expense of overlooking what we have observed to be the fundamental keys to success for all students: experience, expertise, and flexibility.

Gain Experience: Pursue as much practical experience and develop as many references as soon as possible. Look beyond summertime to explore employers; work during the school-year. If you have graduated and do not have a job, pursue law clerk, internships, and other interim opportunities while awaiting bar results and new

develop depth in areas in which they may be interested. In your first year, attend CLEs and law school career events, join bar associations, and connect with alumni mentors to develop knowledge of and contacts in a particular line of work. In your final years, undertake internships, clinics, and seminars that build on one or two substantive and marketable areas.

Be Flexible: There is more than one path to a particular area of the law or employer. If you are interested in employment law, consider EEOC specialist as well as general counsel positions. Interested in homeland security? Look beyond the general counsel of the FBI and consider investigator, analyst, and consulting positions. If you are looking for a family law opening, start as a paid law clerk in a family law firm if no associate positions are immediately available. Interested in business transactions but can't find an opening for a corporate law clerk or associate? Consider bankruptcy and commercial litigation.

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leads. Nothing makes you more marketable and knowledgeable than actually being in the market.

Develop Expertise: In the absence of demonstrable pre-law school expertise in a particular subject matter, students should strive early on to

Dean Mathew Staver

Liberty University School of Law

To increase job opportunities for graduates at Liberty University School of Law, we have taken a multifaceted approach. We have an expansive externship program that allows students to obtain law school credit working pro bono with a wide variety of employers. These externships often translate into jobs after graduation.

Since many mid-sized and large law firms have decreased their hiring, we have provided skills and workshops to students who desire to start their own practice right out of law school. We have a growing number who chose to begin their law career as a solo practitioner. Some form partnerships with their fellow graduates.

Our Career Service and Professional Development department is based on a marketing model, which means it not only teaches students how to apply for a job and interview, but also helps them find jobs. The staff members call, e-mail, write, and visit prospective employers throughout the country. Our various departments also work together to cross-promote. The recruit-

mentees. There is a wide diversity of job markets represented at these events. The law school is represented both from a recruiting and from an employment perspective. Many of our job opportunities have arisen from these speaking events.

Liberty University is a large university that utilizes many law firms. As we have invested in their services, we expect them to remember our graduates. The chancellor has been supportive in making contacts with these law firms and we are in regular contact with them to open up externship and employment opportunities.



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ing department makes contacts with prospective employers at certain events. We have increased our advertising to promote our graduates and we attend and often speak at large events where prospective employers gather.

We have developed many contacts with non-profit organizations. Some of our graduates chose to work in a variety of nonprofit arenas. As the dean of the law school, I speak at a number of events with hundreds and even thousands of

Dean Jeffrey A. Brauch

Regent University School of Law



Dean Jeffrey A. Brauch

I have three recommendations for recent graduates and current law students as they confront a most challenging job market.

First, be open to employment settings other than private practice with a large firm. Big law firms only make up a small number of legal employers, and they are making fewer hires for entry level positions. The majority of legal jobs are with smaller legal organizations, so don't overlook small firms. Similarly, don't overlook positions outside of traditional private practice. In 2011, only 49.5 percent of new lawyer jobs nationwide involved the private practice of law. This was only the second time the percentage was below 50 percent. Consider positions with prosecutor or public defender offices, the JAG corps, or non-traditional organizations emphasizing the intersection of technology and legal services. Finally, don't ignore rural communities that may have needs in small general practice firms or prosecutors' offices.

Second, take advantage of networking opportunities. This has always been important, of course, but it is particularly important in a market like this. Surveys show that more jobs come through networking than any other single avenue,

will get plugged into additional information about employment opportunities. Local and state-wide bar associations are great places to start. For little money and time, you can get to know many people. Be sure to network with experienced attorneys, younger attorneys, as well as your peers because there are important relationships to be forged and important information to be gained from the seasoned and the not so seasoned.

Finally, it is of critical importance that you persevere. Recent trends have indicated that many job offers are taking place later in the hiring season. Some smaller firms have always hired later in the season or have joined some government legal organizations in waiting to hire after recent graduates receive bar results. Some job seekers react to the difficult job market with discouragement and reduced effort. Successful seekers, though, are the ones who confront the challenges of this market by working even harder and persevering. Be in the latter group.

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including on-campus interviewing. Networking is simply building relationships with people. In the legal profession, relationships are very important to everything that we do, so the quicker you begin to build relationships the better. Also, the sooner you begin building relationships, the sooner you

Dean Wendy C. Perdue

University of Richmond School of Law

It is no secret that the recession has adversely impacted the employment market for lawyers and effected structural changes in the delivery of legal services. While data suggests that demand for legal services continues to rise, the demand for law firm services, particularly at large firms, is stagnant at best. As a result, large law firms no longer hire large numbers of lawyers on a regular and predictable schedule. Bringing on a new lawyer is expensive, and employers are no longer willing to hire in large numbers and then wait to see who “works out.”

These structural changes have directly impacted the job search process. Employment opportunities are more dispersed and correspondingly harder to find, and hiring is more likely to be particularized, with employers less likely to be looking for a generic first year associate and more likely to be looking for someone to do a specific job. This puts a premium on job seekers’ ability to identify the diffuse opportunities and communicate effectively that they have the interest, skills, ability, and knowledge to do that particular job. Successful applicants frequently need to do more than merely assert an interest — they need to demonstrate it through courses or clinical placements, or participation in pro bono work, writing competitions, student organizations, or professional associations, including non-legal ones.

Job seekers must harness all possible sources of information about openings and cannot rely solely on published job postings. This is one of the many reasons “networking” is so important. I know students tire of being told to do this, but there is no substitute for talking to people and building relationships. Many jobs are never posted officially or when they are, there already is someone who knows about the job and has a head start on securing it. Go to the local bar meetings. Take advantage of CLE programs in practice areas of interest to you. If you have an internship, don’t just “do your job,” spend a little time with the lawyers you work with to under-

stand what they do, how they got where they are and who else they know whom you might want to meet. Networking is not just about getting job leads. Law students should spend time learning about the world of practice. You will be far more likely to persuade an employer that you have the necessary skills and knowledge if you understand what is required. Talk to as many lawyers as you can to find out what they do and about the essential skills of their jobs. Then, ask yourself whether that is something you would enjoy and something at which you could excel.

If you want to enter the world of legal practice, you should be knowledgeable about that world and the forces impacting it. Therefore you should regularly read a national newspaper as well as the local paper and bar journal of the region in which you hope to practice. Today’s headlines will provide insight into the future growth or decline of particular practice areas. Follow developments in your areas of interest. If you have not narrowed your practice focus, follow general publications such as the *National Law Journal* or *BNA Law Week*.

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Finally, it is important to bring the right mindset to the process. Reid Hoffman, co-founder of LinkedIn, has argued that no matter what your field of interest you need to think and act like you’re running a start-up company. As he explains, no matter your profession, “Today you need to think of yourself as an entrepreneur at the helm of at least one living, growing start-up venture: your career.”¹

1 Reid Hoffman, *The Start-Up of You* (2012).



Dean Wendy C. Perdue

Dean Paul G. Mahoney

University of Virginia School of Law



Dean Paul G. Mahoney

There is no magic formula to finding an entry-level legal job in today's challenging economy, but I will describe three steps we encourage our students to take.

Start with an honest self-evaluation. Our Career Services Office tries to help students identify their transferable skills and teach them how to describe those skills, both in cover letters and in an interview. Recognizing that screening interviews are short, we encourage students to practice making efficient presentations of their strengths along thematic lines that will appeal to employers. Students should also identify and address their weaknesses. In particular, interviews expose weaknesses in interpersonal or communications skills, so we work with students on those skills as necessary during their first year in preparation for interviews.

Second, we encourage each student to take advantage of opportunities to gain practical experience through pro bono work, clinics, or mock trial/moot court. This is particularly true for students who did not work before law school. Almost 50 percent of our current second-year class engaged in pro bono representations during their first year, with many donating a week or more of their time over their winter and/or spring

crete advice. We like to say that "professionalism comes from practice." Working with real clients on real issues helps students develop the professionalism that employers expect.

Finally, we teach students that the job search is not confined to submitting documents to online job postings or emailing out resumes. Our Alumni Career Network includes the names and contact information of thousands of attorneys across the country who have offered to serve as resources to our students. We both encourage our students to meet these generous individuals and train them how to manage networking communications. With the broader knowledge base and additional coaching that networking brings, our students are better prepared for their interviews.

Even with an improving market, the job search is not easy. But by investing time and energy in self-evaluation, gaining practical experience, and networking, students can maximize their outcomes.

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breaks. These activities allow students to develop client relationship skills and work in a professional environment. Moreover, through such experiences, students come to understand how their knowledge of the law translates into con-

Dean Nora V. Demleitner

Washington and Lee School of Law

One of the obligations of a law school in today's marketplace is to help its students and graduates land in a full-time position, primarily of a legal nature. Who should lead that effort in the law school, and how?

Over the last few decades, law schools established career services offices, originally called placement offices and designed to help students find employment. Before that function became "outsourced" to an arm of the administration, it rested with the faculty. With the change in faculty composition over the last thirty years, many faculty members became less able to assist their students. Over time, they also viewed themselves as less obliged to help students find a legal position, which should be no surprise as the university structure has not expected or rewarded faculty assistance for student placement. Whether the creation of career services offices facilitated this development or resulted from it is for others to determine.

Since 2008 many law schools have announced an increase in staffing of their career offices. The justification for additional staff in this area appears self-evident: graduates expect to be employed despite the dismal job market, as they pay high tuition for a professional degree. Career services around the country have generally focused on two areas: outreach to employers to unearth new positions and create connections to new employers and increased focus on getting law students ready for the market through resume review, interview prep, and a heavy focus on how to network.

Is the most effective use of resources the outsourcing of career services to professional staff? Is it the most effective way of job placement? At Washington and Lee we have a small and truly national law school, with less than a third of our students planning on staying in Virginia and the Washington, D.C., area. The others disperse

widely around the country. It is difficult, if not impossible, for a career services office to have relevant connections and market knowledge all around the country. Our alumni (as well as the alumni of our undergraduate institution who have elected careers in law or related areas), however, can provide effective guidance. With the committed alumni we have from both sides of campus, crucial market knowledge and some connections will be available to our students.

Alumni are only one part of a student's potential future network. When students are in an environment where they can work with faculty members closely on meaningful projects, faculty will get to know them as people and be able to assess accurately their analytical and communication abilities. While more established faculty may be able to act directly as "match-makers," all of them can actively advocate for their students and promote them to potential employers. Admittedly, this approach changes current expectations of



Dean Nora V.
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faculty members, which may require appropriate recognition and rewards.

While Career Services will remain crucial as a communications hub, an information center, and a resource, the future careers of our graduates are too precious to be left only with a relatively small administrative office. Our graduates deserve all of our best efforts.

Dean Davison M. Douglas

William and Mary Law School



Dean Davison M. Douglas

As all law students know, we currently face a very challenging legal market. What can law students do to succeed in finding work in this difficult environment? Here are some actions that I would suggest.

Pursue opportunities to gain all the legal experience that you can — both during the summer and academic year. Every law school has a robust externship program; take advantage of those opportunities. In this job market, experience in a variety of legal settings is critically important.

Educate yourself about the job market. Law schools provide a range of programs designed to educate students about different kinds of law practice. At William and Mary, we bring in dozens of lawyers each year to meet with our students in small and large settings to discuss particular practice specialties. These gatherings are extremely valuable, as you gain important information about different areas of practice and can make contacts in a field or city in which you wish to practice law. Attend these sessions; afterwards, introduce yourself to those attorneys whose work is of particular interest to you.

Establish relationships in the legal market and maintain them. If you want to practice law

learn something valuable and maybe an important connection.

Stay in touch. If you've worked somewhere during the summer or during the academic year, or you've met a lawyer from whom you've sought advice, stay in touch. You need a large legal network. Find reasons to maintain your professional relationships.

Be willing to volunteer in a legal setting. When you are young, experience is the most valuable compensation that you receive (even more than the money). If you cannot secure a paid summer job, then approach legal employers and offer to work for free.

Always go the extra mile. When you do secure work (either paid or volunteer), do an excellent job. Develop a reputation for doing thorough and reliable work. At the end of the day, your performance will be what makes the difference.

Stay positive. All you need is one opportunity to prove yourself. When it comes, make the most of it.

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in a particular city, reach out to your law school's alumni in that city and ask for a fifteen-minute meeting in which you seek advice on finding work in that area. Most people are happy to give a younger person advice. In the process, you'll