

CAREER PLANNING FOR EVENING STUDENTS

How to Maximize Your Experience at SULS

As a law student enrolled in the evening division, you are probably juggling a myriad of responsibilities, including work and family obligations, and a heavy course load. While you want to get the most out of your law school experience, you may not be sure how to do it.

The following information may help you better understand how to go about gaining legal experience while managing your other responsibilities. It may also help you appreciate the importance of career planning and the need to prepare for your future as a lawyer beyond attending classes, taking exams and earning your law degree. The legal job market of the 21st century is extremely competitive; we urge you to bolster your future marketability now.

The Legal Job Dilemma

A primary concern may be whether or not to seek legal employment while in law school. For many evening students, this is an extremely difficult decision. More than likely, particularly if you are employed in a professional level position, a legal position will pay less than what you are making, may not offer the benefits your current position extends (health insurance, tuition reimbursement, etc.), and may give you less responsibility in contrast to your present job. Therefore, before you give up a "good thing," you must weigh the cost of leaving your present job against the benefits of gaining the legal skills that will make you attractive to prospective legal employers. Speaking with a career counselor can be helpful; we encourage you to make an appointment to meet with a CDO staff member.

Why You Should Consider Pursuing Legal Work

Regardless of whether your interests are in public service or the private sector, the bottom line is – **practical legal experience increases your marketability**. Legal experience not only demonstrates to employers that you are committed to pursuing a legal career in a specific field of law and you have developed the skills necessary to be effective in that field, it also provides you with references who can attest to your legal ability and acumen. Further, it may enable you to make contact with attorneys who may be helpful in your search for a permanent legal position.

What Legal Employers May Look For (Beyond your Law Degree)

What do legal employers really want in a successful candidate? Your J.D. may be at the beginning of the list of qualifications; however, they may also be looking for:

- ✿ writing/research experience
- ✿ demonstrated interest in a specific practice area or type of organization
- ✿ maturity level
- ✿ ability to bring in clients
- ✿ practical knowledge of practice area
- ✿ good grades in area of interest

F.Y.I. Inexperienced graduates competing with classmates who were able to acquire legal experience may find their job search to be considerably more difficult (but not impossible - there are a number of graduates of the Evening Division who did not pursue legal employment while in law school and who are presently working in rewarding legal positions). It can be done; but it requires significant long-range planning.

Alternatives to Quitting Your Non-Legal Job

Should you decide to continue to work in your non-legal position through law school, you must consider other ways to become marketable to legal employers. Here are a few suggestions:

Participate in a law-related project in your present position. Some corporate legal departments hire interns - perhaps your company's legal department could assign you a short-term project involving legal research or writing. If this is not possible, focus on developing your "**transferable skills**" (e.g., interpreting contracts and other legal documents, performing factual investigation, editing, negotiating with clients, analyzing complex issues, writing proposals or researching compliance with federal/state regulations, etc.) and highlight those skills on your resume.

Take elective courses in your primary area of interest. For example, if you know you want to practice tax law upon graduation, take as many tax-related courses as possible. Prospective employers are likely to focus more on your courses and grades if you do not possess legal experience.

Become a Research Assistant. Consider a research assistant position with a faculty member who is focusing in your area of interest. Such a position may require just a few hours per week and can provide you with excellent research and writing experience.

Participate in clinical programs, academic internships, volunteer opportunities and Pro Bono opportunities. Participation in these may require some flexibility with regard to your schedule. Many students have taken advantage of their company's flex-time (e.g., a four-day work week) or used their vacation time to gain hands-on legal experience.

If you wish to learn more about available academic internships and requirements, make an appointment with the director of the SULLS internship program. Volunteering for a legal organization can be a very rewarding experience. Think about how you might creatively use your free time over the summer or during school breaks. Public interest employers are probably your best targets for this type of arrangement. To learn more about the Pro Bono Program contact Michelle Harper, the Director of Public Interest and Pro Bono Programs. The Rappaport Center for Law and Public Service Office is located in Suite 110.

Some employers list temporary positions with the Career Development Office. The amount of time required for these positions varies from job to job and can range from a one-time-only research assignment to an involvement in a month-long legal project.

Consider freelancing/contract work. Try sending your resume to employers who specialize in your area of interest. Indicate in your cover letter you are available to work sporadically, on short-term projects. You may be able to generate some interest using this approach (especially among smaller law firms and public interest employers).

Networking/Informational interviewing. The On-Line Community (link is located on CDO home page) contains contact information for Suffolk Law alumni. Consider contacting alumni to learn

more about their area of expertise. Meeting with attorneys who focus in your area of interest can help you develop a better understanding of the work involved and bolster your confidence in marketing your skills to legal employers. For more information, please see our handout on networking which is available on-line and in the Career Development Library.

Attend career-related panels. The Career Development Office presents a number of career panels throughout the academic year. A program schedule can be obtained in advance in order to plan your attendance at a career panel of interest. In addition, some panels are scheduled between 5:00 pm- 6:00 pm to better enable interested evening students to attend.

Schedule a mock interview with a career counselor. If you would like to improve your interviewing skills and learn how to market your "transferable" skills, set up a mock interview with a member of the CDO staff.

Take part in school/bar association activities. Consider becoming an active member of the Boston, Massachusetts, American or other Bar Association Committees or joining a student group. You will be able to begin your professional networking and work side by side with attorneys and students who share your interests. Many committees meet during lunch hour. The Career Development Office has a listing of the many bar associations in Massachusetts.

Write, write, write. Write an article for publication in a legal or non-legal journal. Writing an article is a good way to show a prospective employer that you do, indeed, have a genuine interest in a particular area of the law. Legal employers recognize the time and commitment necessary to write a publishable article. Also consider writing about an area of strong interest for your upper-class writing requirement.

If you would like to learn more about any of these suggestions, make an appointment with a CDO career counselor.

What to Expect Should You Decide to Seek Legal Employment

If you decide to seek legal experience in conjunction with your education, you must recognize that the legal job market is a different market from that which you may be accustomed. Therefore, you should start your job search by making an appointment with a career counselor to discuss your background, skills, interests and any special considerations. Together, you can develop an effective job search strategy. In addition, you may want to retool your resume to emphasize skills and experiences that will be most relevant to legal employers.

Timing: When to Do It?

While there is no one specific time to make the shift from a non-legal to a legal position, there are certain windows of opportunity during your four-year program when a transition may be more easily achieved. Consider the following:

If you are interested in ...

Full-time law clerk positions: Many employers post full-time law clerk positions with the CDO at the beginning of the academic year (August and September - although listings are posted throughout the year). Some of these positions will be salaried and include benefits. Most will only offer an hourly wage. Check the online job postings on Symplicity for evening student positions. There are several Symplicity training sessions scheduled throughout the year. The 1L evening division students will receive their Symplicity training in November. If you need a login and password for Symplicity, please call the Career Development Office at 617-573-8148.

Third-year evening students may have an easier time securing law clerk positions because many employers seek a two-year commitment. In addition, some employers feel first- and second-year evening students do not possess enough academic experience to handle the duties required. However, keep in mind these are generalizations; employer expectations will vary.

Part-time law clerk positions: If you wish to work part-time (20 hours per week or less) during the academic year, check the part-time opportunities in the online job postings for more information. While the office receives information on available positions throughout the academic year, the majority of the job listings are posted at the beginning of each semester.

Summer law clerk positions: If you wish to seek a summer law clerk position, check the online job postings on Symplicity for listings of summer opportunities. The office receives the majority of summer listings in the spring. Summer law clerk positions are usually temporary and may not necessarily lead to a full-time attorney position after graduation. In contrast, a summer associate position usually implies you will be considered for a permanent position with the firm provided your work meets/exceeds the employer's expectations.

Summer associate positions: If you wish to work as a summer associate at a law firm, generally your third-year summer is the time to do so. If you are most interested in large law firms, you must apply in August and September of your third year. The Fall Recruitment Program, managed by the CDO, is the vehicle through which you are most likely to secure a summer associate position with a large law firm.

Please note: Most large law firms only make offers for full-time employment to students who have successfully matriculated through their summer associate program. Therefore, if you wish to be considered for permanent employment upon graduation, you should apply to large law firms at the beginning of your third year.

While some large firms may interview fourth-year evening students for full-time employment, the vast majority use their summer associate programs to evaluate the legal ability of promising candidates. Mid-sized and smaller firms also hire summer associates but may do so later in the academic year. Mid-sized firms may start hiring in the fall or early spring (it will vary from firm to firm). Smaller firms generally hire their summer associates in the spring.

Government agencies/Public interest positions: If you wish to work in the public sector, consider participating in one of the Government/Public Interest Recruitment Programs during your second, third or fourth year. There are two programs each year: one in the fall (October) and one in the spring (January). Many evening students obtain positions through these interviewing programs.

If you are interested in a career in public service, make sure to make an appointment with the Rappaport Center for Law and Public Service. Their office is located on the first floor of Sargent Hall in suite 110.

As mentioned earlier, participation in the Law School's clinical programs and academic internships is also a great way to gain experience and make important contacts in the public sector. The CDO houses numerous public interest directories that list contact information on many Boston area agencies and organizations. Our website lists links to several public interest sites including www.pslawnet.org, a national database of legal internships that are available in the fall, spring and summer. Evening students are encouraged to explore possible opportunities in the public sector. However, to be considered for a full-time attorney position with a local, state or federal government office, you may have to wait until you have passed the bar exam before you can expect an offer.

A few of the more competitive federal agencies (Department of Justice, IRS, FDIC) hire new attorneys through what is known as their "Honors Program" which is usually the only entry to the agency directly from law school.

Please note: If you are interested in an "Honors Program," please ask a member of the Career Development Office or the Rappaport Center for Law and Public Service, when it is appropriate to apply. Timetables may vary but usually you must be accepted to an honors program while you are still a student (unless you will be serving as a judicial clerk after graduation).

Judicial clerkships: Evening students interested in obtaining a federal or state judicial clerkship need to apply in the early fall of their fourth year (deadlines are usually around early September; please check with the CDO for updated deadline information). The CDO houses detailed hiring prospectuses from each state court as well as a number of excellent judicial directories for your information. If you wish to learn more about clerkships, please see our handouts on judicial clerkships in the CDO and make an appointment with the Judicial Clerkship Advisor, Margaret Talmers.

Finally, we recommend that you keep informed of job openings, deadlines for recruiting and career-related programs through *Spotlight*, the Career Development Office newsletter that is available online and in the CDO office every Thursday afternoon during the academic year.

See our Career Related Programs listing for Summer and Fall 2009, and please R.S.V.P for the programs via Symplicity.