

LAW SCHOOL CAREER PLANNING & TIME ALLOCATION

Making a job search plan is a process not unlike preparing for law school classes. You need to know what's expected of you, be well-organized and prepare to explain what you know; in the context of a job search plan, who you are and what you want. You will want to concentrate your efforts in the areas that have a higher probability of producing results, and not waste your efforts on activities that have little pay-off (like sending out a mass mailing).

Done properly, career planning is a process of laying a foundation and then adding to that a little at a time. The skills that we emphasize in the CDO are not things that you will memorize and then forget (like the Rule in Shelley's Case) as soon as you have a job. The skills that you use in finding a job to begin your legal career are the same ones you'll use to advance in your career and to develop clients and professional relationships.

1. Assess Yourself

When you begin law school, it can be difficult to assess yourself for the purpose of deciding what kind of lawyer you want to be. Many of you don't have all the information you need yet to make that kind of decision. However, it's never too early to begin the process of learning about your dislikes, your strengths, and focusing on the kind of work environment you'd prefer.

A few ways that self-assessment can help are:

- Getting you to focus on your strengths, which you can then emphasize when you prepare your resume and cover letters and when you interview with potential employers.
- Making you aware of the skills and attributes that many lawyers possess. Knowing that communication, problem solving, taking initiative and showing leadership are very important in practicing law, you may want to choose your extra-curricular and summer employment activities or participate in them in such a way that allows you to use and develop those skills.
- Making you aware of the many different things you can do with a J.D.

Self-assessment is an ongoing process. As you take more classes, participate in more law-related activities and learn about all the different ways to practice law, you will want to continue the process of self-assessment. The CDO has diagnostic tools and people to help you with that evolution.

Once you have a good understanding of who you are and what you want, it's time to gather information about the practice of law and alternative legal careers.

2. Assess Your Market

You will want to learn as much as you can about potential employers, practice areas, career options and trends in the practice of law. You may have come to McGeorge knowing that you want to be a D.A. or you may finish your first semester thinking you were a fool not to go to business school; either way, it makes sense to explore your options.

There are many ways you can accomplish this. The CDO has many resources available, from books and directories to speakers and workshops. Don't hesitate to ask a professor about a practice area or legal employer, and don't think it's too early to skim through legal newspapers looking for topics or people you find intriguing.

One of the best ways to get first-hand information about practice areas and employers is to conduct informational interviews. With informational interviews, you are requesting a brief meeting with someone NOT to ask for a job but to ask questions about the practice of law and get advice about your preparation for a legal career. The CDO can help you identify people who would potentially be good contacts for informational interviews; one of the best places to start is with McGeorge alumni who are in a geographic or practice area that you like.

You don't have to commit to anything at this point. The important thing is to learn about the legal market, get an idea of what you *might* be interested in, and know how to ask for help or guidance to find out more.

After you begin exploring the world of legal careers and learning what employers look for in clerks and new attorneys, you'll be ready to put together an awesome resume.

3. **Prepare High Quality Professional Materials**

Once you have a good understanding of your own strengths and you have some idea about the legal market, you will need to prepare your marketing materials. Your resume and cover letters will not usually get you the job, but they can open doors for you—or close them!

Many students assume that because they have a resume from their undergraduate days or from a previous career, all they need to do is add McGeorge as the current educational institution and start making copies. However, legal resumes are unique and there are very definite (and quirky) “do’s and don’ts” to follow. Don’t use old marketing materials to tell the story of what you can offer a potential legal employer now.

The *Power Resumes* and *Captivating Cover Letters* workshops will give you tips on preparing your marketing materials. The CDO staff will review your materials for you, and you can make an appointment to meet with a career advisor to discuss your individual concerns.

4. **Allocate Your Time Properly**

Most law students and attorneys find their jobs through referrals and self-initiated contacts, including contacting employers and responding to job openings. This means that you will have to expend some effort and be organized about your career search plans. The vast majority of law-related jobs are not advertised, and there are relatively few posted openings for part-time or summer clerks or entry-level attorneys. You will need to spend time learning about the legal market and identifying potential employers that you’d like to work for. Once you identify these potential employers, you can reach out to them in a variety of ways, from informational interviewing to targeted mailers. **DO NOT WASTE YOUR TIME SENDING OUT A MASS MAILER (one generic letter to tons of employers) BECAUSE THEY DO NOT WORK.**

Like all ABA law schools, McGeorge has an on-campus interview program. While we encourage you to participate in OCI, it should be just one of several strategies you use to find a great job.

During your first year at McGeorge, we recommend that you spend fifteen to twenty hours on your career development plans. Since you have many other demands on your time and other responsibilities that have more immediate deadlines, the best way to make sure that you allow time for your career development efforts is to schedule them into your routine. Note in your calendar exactly when you will work on these tasks. By breaking down the career development process into small, manageable tasks, you take control of the process and it becomes much less overwhelming.

EXAMPLES OF HOW FIRST YEAR STUDENTS CAN ALLOCATE TIME FOR CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

JANUARY:

- Read the *Preparing a Legal Resume* handout. 20 minutes
- Attend Resume & Cover Letter Writing Workshop in the CDO if your professional materials aren't complete 1 hour
- Prepare, review and revise your resume. 2 hours
- Submit your resume to the CDO for review and meet with a career advisor to discuss plans 30-60 minutes
- Review the Mentor/Career Resource tab on McGeorgeCareersOnline to identify alumni whom you can meet with or talk to informally to learn more about a practice area or employer 1 hour
- Review participating employers and submit materials for the Public Interest/Public Sector Job Fair in February 2010 1-3 hours
- If interested and qualified, apply for the Sacramento County Bar Association Diversity Fellowship program 3 hours

FEBRUARY:

- Plan to attend the McGeorge Career Fair in February 2010 3 hours
- Send a letter to an alumna/alumnus or other contact requesting an informational interview 1 hour

- Call the recipients of your letter(s) requesting informational interviews and arrange a time to meet 10 minutes
- Work on self-assessment exercises 1-2 hours
- Attend informational panel of second year students who found legal work their summer after first year 1 hour
- Conduct informational interview 30 minutes
- Prepare draft cover letter and submit to CDO for review 1 hour
- Send out cover letter and resume to 4 potential employers 2 hours
- Plan to attend the Northern California Public Interest/ Public Sector Job Fair in San Francisco 3 hours (+travel)
- Call to follow up on the 4 letters you sent out 20 minutes
- Send a letter to an alumna/alumnus or other contact requesting an informational interview during spring break 1 hour

MARCH:

- Attend a "Day in the Life" Speakers Series meeting to learn more about a particular practice area 1 hour
- If you are work-study qualified, check with the Financial Aid Office to learn about public sector employers that hire first year students for summer positions 30 minutes
- If you receive an offer for a position with a public agency or non-profit organization that cannot offer a salary, complete an application for the McGeorge Summer Grant program to request funding for your position 2 hours
- Continue to review job listings on McGeorgeCareersOnline Varies