

CAREER PLANNING FOR THE EVENING STUDENT: SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

While there are general career planning issues and strategies that are common to all law students, evening students have a few special considerations in developing their legal career plans. Although evening students come to law school with diverse experience and different goals, there are a number of general principles and suggestions that are helpful to just about everyone.

DO I HAVE TO GET A LEGAL JOB WHILE I'M GOING TO LAW SCHOOL?

For many evening students, gaining legal experience while in law school presents a very big challenge. Many evening students work full-time, are established in responsible, well-paying positions and would find it almost impossible to either quit or take time off from their present jobs. However, legal experience during law school *will* increase your marketability. Legal experience demonstrates to employers that you are committed to pursuing a career as an attorney, that you have begun to develop practical skills, and that you have references that can speak to your research, writing, and other professional abilities. Because inexperienced students compete with experienced students for the same jobs, the inexperienced graduate's job search can be far more difficult. Also, if you don't get legal experience in law school, you are missing out on the opportunity to "test drive" a practice area or practice setting to see if it's the right fit for you.

You must weigh for yourself the costs of getting legal experience. Frequently, a legal position while in law school will be lower paying than a non-legal professional position that you've held for many years. Entry-level legal positions may not include benefits (health insurance, etc.) and will possibly give you little responsibility in comparison to your established non-legal position. There are many graduates of the evening division who were unable to pursue legal experience while in law school, but who are presently in rewarding attorney positions. It can be done, but it requires some long-range planning on your part.

CAN I GAIN MARKETABLE EXPERIENCE WITHOUT HAVING A LEGAL JOB?

If you decide not to seek legal employment while a law student, consider other ways to make yourself more marketable to future potential legal employers:

- Examine opportunities in your present position. Is there a possibility that you can do law-related projects? Do you have an opportunity to work on

transferable skills such as research, writing, communication, and analytical skills? Examine your skills and experiences to determine what is transferable to the practice of law, even if you are in a non-legal position.

- Take elective courses that are interesting and marketable.
- Participate in Moot Court or Mock Trial. This will give you an opportunity to develop important writing, oral advocacy, and litigation skills.
- Join one of McGeorge's law reviews and write articles on subjects that interest you (especially in areas where you may want to specialize later).
- Write an article for a legal journal or writing competition. Writing an article deepens your understanding of an area of law and demonstrates your writing ability and commitment to your development as a lawyer.
- Participate in skills classes such as Trial and Appellate Advocacy (Global Lawyering Skills II), Negotiations, and Interviewing classes.
- Look at the Alumni Mentor/Career Resource tab on McGeorgeCareersOnline to find an alumni mentor in a practice or geographic area that interests you. These alumni have volunteered to offer insight and advice to law students, and some of them were evening students themselves.
- Network and conduct informational interviews. Networking is simply meeting people who may be able to help you in your career planning and job search. Through informational interviewing you can ask people specific questions about their careers so that you can gather information, narrow your career search, and make connections with practitioners. Building your professional & legal network while you're in law school is not only a lifelong skill, self-initiated contacts and referrals are how most new graduates get jobs.
- Attend professional meetings and events. Better yet, volunteer with local, specialty, or affinity bar association sections and attend Continuing Legal Education (CLE) classes (some CLE classes are held right here at McGeorge). At these events you can meet attorneys and begin to build professional relationships.
- Join law school and other legal organizations to develop contacts. Employers do take into account a student's involvement and leadership roles.
- Get to know your professors; ask them for advice and referrals. Consider becoming a Research Assistant. Most professors hire at least two Research Assistants at any given time. The research is done on your own time.

- Consider doing special projects for attorneys that will give you experience while affording flexible hours.
- If you have the flexibility, consider doing a field placement for academic credit in a government agency or non-profit that interests you. In lieu of an elective class, you can work as few as ten hours per week for a semester and get hands-on legal experience.
- Participate in the Law Student Pro Bono Project. The Law Student Pro Bono Project connects law students with pro bono opportunities that match their interests and fit into their busy schedules. The Project provides short-term and long-term legal volunteer projects, including legal aid agencies, court-based programs, and social services providers. To learn more go to www.lawstudentprobono.org.

HOW & WHEN CAN I GET LEGAL EXPERIENCE?

There are several different timing options available to you in gaining legal experience. The first one, to graduate without legal experience, is discussed above. The others are outlined for you below:

- Get legal experience immediately after graduation. Take the months after graduation (and the bar exam) to work as a law clerk before seeking a permanent position. Most graduates do this while awaiting bar exam results.
- Become a law clerk during law school. After the first, second, or third year of law school, obtain a full-time law clerk position and keep it throughout the rest of law school. You can look for law clerk job postings on McGeorgeCareersOnline.
- Work for different legal employers. After the first, second, or third year of law school, obtain a full-time law clerk position, but work one or more summer(s) for a different legal employer. You can do this either by taking the summer(s) off from your full-time law clerk position or by working a series of one-year positions. If you follow this plan, you will graduate having worked for two or more different legal employers.
- Be creative when deciding when to clerk. Do not obtain full-time clerking positions during the academic year, but take two sabbaticals from your non-legal job to clerk the summers after either or both of your 2nd and 3rd years of law school.
- Work at a legal clinic while in school. Participate in an on-campus clinic at any

point during your law school career. You may participate in off-campus Field Placements year-round. Note that some Field Placements will allow you to flex your hours, for example, front loading your work in the first half of the semester.

No matter when in your legal education you decide to gain legal experience, know that you have many “real life” skills that employers find invaluable—time management, multi-tasking, maturity and judgment, critical reasoning and analytical skills, communications skills, and more. Your success in a non-legal field shows legal employers that you understand how to be a professional; adding the skills that come with legal experience makes you an even more highly qualified candidate.