

UNDERSTANDING THE LEGAL MARKET

Whether or not you had a career before coming to law school, it's important to have an understanding of how the legal market works so that you can make realistic and well-considered plans about pursuing your goals. The process of entering the legal employment market is similar to entering other fields, but there are important distinctions.

WHO HIRES WHEN (AND HOW)

To better plan your own career strategy, it helps to be familiar with the hiring practices and preferences of different types of legal employers.

Large-size private law firm employers. New law students quickly find out about the On-Campus Interview (OCI) program held in the fall. You can't help but notice the students dressed in suits and running around campus to make it to interviews on time. While the OCI program attracts a lot of attention, it is not the best source for employment for most people.

The employers who participate in OCI are typically large-size employers who can predict their hiring needs rather far in advance. The employers coming on campus in the fall are looking at 2D/3E clerking candidates for the following summer (7-8 months after the interviews) and 3D/4E associate candidates for the following fall, after the Bar Exam has been taken (up to a year after the interviews). These large employers usually receive hundreds of resumes; one of the easiest ways to quickly screen applicants from this huge pool is to have strict GPA and/or class rank cut-offs. You will notice that many of the employers who come to campus request that applicants have a certain class rank or meet other criteria such as moot court or law review. When people mistakenly tell you that the CDO only helps students at the top of the class, it is usually because they see that the OCI employers typically ask for students at the top of the class. At McGeorge, fewer than 15% of students get their jobs through on-campus programs.

While most large employers do begin the recruitment process in the fall, you don't have to wait and see which employers come to McGeorge. If there is an employer that you are interested in, it's appropriate to send them a resume and cover letter on your own. It's more unusual for large employers to come on campus to recruit 1D/2E students, so as a first-year you should definitely plan on independently soliciting those employers.

Small and medium-size private law firm employers. The majority of law students who go into private practice work for a small or medium-size employer. While some small and medium employers participate in Fall OCI, the vast majority do not because they don't know what their hiring needs will be that far in advance. We do get more small and medium-size employers that participate in Spring OCI. If you are interested in working for this type of employer, you will want to find out as much as you can about their practice areas and remember that a "no" often means "not right now" because they don't have an immediate opening.

Government. Federal, state and municipal agencies vary in recruiting practices. For nearly all federal agencies and for large state agencies employing a number of attorneys, such as The Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General, recruiting of law students for summer positions begins in the fall as it does with large private law firms. However, state agencies tend to hire attorneys year-round on an as-needed basis. While graduating students interested in working for the government after graduation usually need to follow civil service qualification and registration requirements, students working as summer clerks or as part-time clerks during the academic year aren't always required to meet those criteria. Recruiting by agencies will also depend greatly on budget considerations, so certain agencies can't or don't hire until a new fiscal year budget has been approved. Because the process of obtaining post-graduate employment with a government agency can be lengthy, you should begin the process during your last year of law school, before you graduate. Many deadlines for federal agencies are in September and October of your last year, so plan ahead. If you'd like to learn more about working for a California state agency, look at our handout--*Introduction to California State Hiring*.

Keep in mind that many agencies participate in McGeorge's Field Placement program, and you may be able to work for an agency while earning academic units. For more information about Field Placement opportunities, stop by the Field Placement office on the first floor of Northwest Hall or link to http://www.mcgeorge.edu/Academic_Programs/Experiential_Learning/Field_Placement/Externships.htm to view a directory of field placements.

Business & Industry. Some law students choose to work for private businesses, either in legal departments or in roles that are traditionally non-legal. Most large companies with in-house legal departments do not recruit entry-level attorneys. These companies typically only consider attorneys with at least a few years of experience.

Judicial Clerkships. Clerking for a judge is an excellent way to learn about the legal system. Clerking often makes a student or graduate much more appealing to law firms because they consider clerking to be an invaluable and prestigious experience. While most California state court judges use career clerks, other states regularly hire term (temporary) clerks. There is a very definite process to follow if you are interested in pursuing a federal court clerkship. Although you won't apply until late summer before your third year, you should begin seriously exploring judicial clerkships in the fall of your 2D/3E year, for judicial clerkships beginning after graduation. The application process will begin in the spring of your 2D/3E year. Judicial clerkships are either a one or two-year commitment. The CDO and the Faculty Judicial Clerkship Committee sponsor comprehensive workshops to familiarize students with the process of obtaining state and federal clerkships.

Public Interest. There are literally thousands of public interest agencies and organizations that employ attorneys. While some public interest employers begin

recruiting in the fall, most don't start interviewing until the spring for that year's summer or postgraduate positions. While public interest employers look for strong candidates, they don't tend to put as much focus on grades and class rank; they do look for a commitment to public service and a candidate's community involvement.

Many public interest employers participate in job fairs, and McGeorge co-sponsors the Northern California Public Interest/Public Sector Legal Careers Day, to be held this February at the University of California, Hastings College of the Law in San Francisco. We also host a public interest job fair for regional employers in February 2010.

We have many resources available in the CDO to help you identify potential public interest employers, and we are a member of Equal Justice Works, an Internet database of job opportunities in the public sector working for public interest agencies or private law firms doing pro bono work.