
Timing of a Post-Graduation Job Search

Office of Career and Professional Development
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BACKGROUND ON THE TIMING OF A POST-GRAD JOB SEARCH

- **Legal employers increasingly do NOT hire in advance. They hire as needed.** The exceptions are Early Interview Program participants (big firms or small firms seeking only top of the class); the federal government, courts and very competitive public interest employers. During law school everyone tends to focus on these employers. But most law school grads get jobs from smaller firms, state government, corporate employers and public interest firms that hire on an as-needed basis.
- **Myth:** "There's no point in looking for a job until November because no one will hire a lawyer that isn't licensed to practice." **This is REALLY bad advice.** Do teens not practice driving until they get their driver's license? NO! They use their learner's permit to get as much driving practice as possible. When they get their restricted driver's license do they not look for opportunities to drive because they can't drive at night or with minors in the car? NO! They drive as much as they can, waiting with bated breath until they are unrestricted. Future employers want to see grads who are like those teens -- getting all the practice they can and itching to be a fully licensed lawyer.
- **Ask to be hired as a law clerk.** A law school grad is not a practicing attorney yet, but can do just about everything a newly admitted attorney can do except counsel clients solo or represent clients in court or negotiations.
- **Attitude and stamina help:** Grads who jump into some kind of work soon after taking the bar have better attitudes and more stamina for a strategic job search than grads who hold out for month after month for the ideal job. Grads who take a lot of time off, travel for months or hang around the house waiting for results can be seized by inertia and may find it harder to get motivated. We've been told by grads that it was harder than they'd thought it would be getting into the market after not working for a long period after taking the bar.
- **Employers like to hire known entities** so they often hire grads that have worked or volunteered for them previously. They may even make a position available for a volunteer who did a superb job.
- **Professional job searches take 3 to 6 months, in a good market.** Plan for the search to take six months; be thrilled if it is shorter!

WHAT TO DO BETWEEN GRADUATION AND TAKING THE BAR:

- Have a sense of job search goals (see our handout "Effective Job Search Strategies for 3Ls and Recent Grads", particularly the "Develop a Plan" section).
- Have a **resume and basic cover letter ready to go.**
- Studying for the Bar is a full time job -- passing is the best way to support a job search.

- While studying, periodically search favorite sites for posted jobs -- such as the websites of dream employers or HastingsCareersOnline.com (HCO). Send out applications for advertised jobs.
- **Stay in touch with contacts.** Not a lot, but use breaks from studying to stay connected.

WHAT TO DO BETWEEN TAKING THE BAR AND PASSING THE BAR:

- **Treat your search as a job!** A recent grad told us he worked 35 to 40 hours a week as a temp law clerk and worked 20 to 30 hours looking for a job -- it was tiring but paid off. Time and again we see that the process of applying gives grads practice advocating for themselves appropriately; this makes them more successful in their search and more successful as lawyers. Get lots of practice applying!
- **Stay connected to everyone you know and build your professional contacts network!** Why are we a broken record with this advice? Statistics and our observation show this is the best way to get a job. Nationwide, in 2012, 51.4% of grads found their jobs through people they knew or reached out to on their own. Only 20.4% of the same group got their job through the Internet or other posting. Make sure everyone you know is aware of what you are looking for; do informational interviews; talk to lots of people. (See our handout "Effective Job Search Strategies for 3Ls and Recent Grads", particularly the section **Build a Professional Community**, and the "Making the Connection" handout).
- **Check out reliable websites daily for postings and apply promptly, but don't rely only on websites,** as this time of year is the doldrums for posted openings.
- **Send out prospecting letters.** This is the perfect time to target employers and send them letters that describe your interest and transferable skills, even if there isn't a posted opening.
- **Apply for jobs seeking a junior admitted lawyer.** Except for government jobs, most smart employers seeking a junior lawyer will consider the perfect not-yet-admitted candidate and consider hiring that candidate on a provisional basis, a permanent offer contingent upon passing the bar.
- **Apply for temporary law clerk work.** More and more employers, particularly in uncertain economic times, hire recent grads as independent, hourly contractors -- "contract attorneys." This benefits the employer -- the employer can verify that the fit works; can test out the grad's work product; and can terminate the relationship if the grad doesn't pass the bar. It can also benefit the grad -- the grad can test out the fit; can build a resume; can make professional contacts, and can pay the rent while awaiting bar results.
- **If you don't have paid legal work, volunteer!** Volunteer someplace that will increase skills a future employer needs you to have. Want to litigate? Volunteer at a court, at BASF's volunteer legal services, at a District or City Attorney's office. Want to mediate? Be a volunteer mediator for small claims court or local mediation services.
- **Keep an eye out for government job openings** -- more and more government agencies like DA and PD offices are moving up their application deadlines -- for BEFORE bar results come out.

WHAT TO DO AFTER BAR RESULTS:

- **For those who don't pass, do not despair.** It is a normal event and you will be successful in the long run. The Career Office has tons of advice and referrals and can support anyone who doesn't pass the first time.
- **For those who pass, ramp up your search for a permanent position.**
- **Look for jobs that are advertising for recent admittees or any job seeking zero to 2 years experience.** Advocate in your cover letter for how your volunteer experience and transferable skills make you the best candidate, even without the 1 or 2 years experience as an admitted lawyer.
- Expect that responses to applications, interviews, and everything else will slow down from Thanksgiving through the New Year. **But follow up anyway**, just be understanding of the holiday slowness.
- Many, many grads get permanent offers in late January, early February. But again -- **DON'T WAIT UNTIL THEN TO APPLY!**

The Career Office is here to support your post-grad job search. Make an appointment [here](#).