

# LL.M. CAREER PLANNING STRATEGIES



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## **Introduction – The Importance of Career Planning**

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**Academic Achievement**

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## LL.M. CAREER PLANNING STRATEGIES

### **INTRODUCTION – THE IMPORTANCE OF CAREER PLANNING**

An effective job search requires hard work and advance planning. This handbook serves as a roadmap for planning your career search, and should supplement regular correspondence with your Professional Development counselor. It breaks down what can be an intimidating undertaking – that of finding a job – into concrete and manageable tasks:

- Self-Assessment
- Academic Achievement
- Organization and Research
- Taking Action
- Networking
- Preparation of Documentation; Targeted Mailings

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

Self-assessment is essential for identifying a career best suited to your strengths and interests. It is a simple prescription: law students and lawyers alike should routinely engage in self-assessment to maximize job satisfaction.

According to Deborah Arron, author of *What Can You Do With a Law Degree?*, self-assessment for lawyers involves finding answers to three basic questions:

- Who Am I?
- What Do I Want?
- What Am I Willing to Give Up to Get What I Want?

Your flexibility in responding to these questions will directly impact your career planning strategies. Flexibility is important in today's challenging legal employment market. To effectively market yourself to a broad range of employers, capitalize on your general background, but highlight your specific areas of interest. While promoting the strength of your LL.M. degree is valuable to some employers, others are equally interested in lawyers who are versatile and adaptable.

Keep an open mind when deciding on geographic location, size of firm/organization, salary and ideal employer. While you may start with your "perfect job" in mind, there may be several unexpected obstacles on the way to obtaining, or you may change your preferences as you start searching for it.

#### **Who Am I?**

Determine your interests and skills. Decide what motivates you professionally and what type of office environment appeals to you. Define your values.

## **What Do I Want?**

Clearly define your career plan and goals for the future. Ask yourself and other professionals what kinds of experiences will be necessary to advance to the next level. Next, carefully evaluate how prior work experiences shaped your current professional goals. In a nutshell, did you enjoy the experiences or not? Use these impressions to guide your career planning strategy.

## **What Am I Willing to Give Up?**

Determine what you will sacrifice to reach your goals. Are you willing to give up time, salary, security, and/or professional satisfaction? It is important to ask yourself questions about your comfort level with the requirements of a particular position. Personal sacrifice is required for almost any job.

## **ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IS CRITICAL**

Poor academic performance at Georgetown will negatively impact your ability to achieve your career goals. The best legal employers demand excellent academic performance, regardless of what institution a student attends, and this has never been truer than in our current economic climate. The following factors will directly impact your marketability:

- Your J.D. Law School Rank
- Your Academic Performance in Your J.D. Program
- Honors You Have Received
- Your LL.M. Academic Performance
- Excellent Oral and Written English Skills

## **ORGANIZATION AND RESEARCH**

An effective job search is an organized job search.

- Commit the Necessary Amount of Time That a Successful Job Search Requires
- Commit to The “Follow-through”
- Pursue All Leads
- Maintain Communication With Established Contacts

Researching prospective employers is critical for a successful job search. The following steps will help organize your research:

- Research the practice areas in which you are potentially interested. The OGP, OCS and OPICS resource libraries contain information describing various employment settings, including private practice, government, non-profit, corporate in-house and non-legal fields.

- Generate a target list of at least twenty (20) employers in your chosen geographic region.
- Create a separate binder for each type of employer (e.g., a one binder for law firms, another for government agencies, and a third for international organizations).
- Each time you take any action regarding your job search, take careful notes and document the action taken. When things become hectic later on, this will keep your information organized. Keep copies of all correspondence with each employer, including e-mail.
- Identify upcoming deadlines for each employer and create a timeline for yourself.

## **TAKING ACTION**

Once you have organized yourself and created a target list of potential employers, it is time to carry out your plan of action.

- Networking
- Targeted mailings
- Obtaining Direct Legal Experience

## **NETWORKING**

*\* Networking will potentially be the most important aspect of your career search.*

Approximately 80% of all available positions are *not* advertised to the general public. Networking and developing contacts is a time consuming process and will not always produce immediate results. Effective contacts require cultivation. Consequently, networking should start as soon as you are enrolled in the LL.M. program, and should continue throughout your professional career.

### **1. Cultivating Contacts**

The first step in networking consists of identifying both existing contacts and ways to create new ones. Early in the fall semester, generate a list of the following contacts:

#### ***Personal Connections***

Contact family and friends. Go through your address book, and contact not only those people who have a connection with the legal field, but also anyone who might have connections in your chosen geographic area.

#### ***Professional Connections***

Pay particular attention to those people with whom you have worked in the past. Think of past internships or full-time employment situations, and contact former supervisors. In

addition, some of you might have had exposure to clients who might have counsel or other connections in your area.

### ***Former and Current Professors***

Your law professors both at Georgetown and at your J.D. program know many people in the legal world. Seek out the advice of professors with whom you have had contact and in whose classes you excelled.

### ***You Are Never “Done” Networking***

Stay on the radar of your existing contacts, and keep your own radar looking for new ones:

- Order Georgetown business cards (<http://www.gupmcards.com/>) sooner rather than later. Make sure that they set out your contact details clearly and concisely and describe you as “LL.M. candidate.”
- Join as many bar and professional associations and student organizations as possible. Monitor their events and attend as many as your schedule allows. Participating in events and regular meetings will go far toward helping you meet attorneys practicing in your area and gathering substantive information.
- Attend firm receptions and professional speaking engagements as often as possible. Do not just have drinks and hors d’oeuvres, have questions. Introduce yourself to important people and make an impression. Always ask for a business card, and hand out your own business card.
- Volunteer or work part-time. Ultimately, the best way to research a particular setting is to spend time there. Washington offers extensive opportunities for law students to work in private practice, government, corporate, public interest and community service organizations.
- Use your network to network. The people you know can introduce you to people you do not know. Request the names of additional contacts from your sources.

## **2. Contacting Your Contacts**

Your initial contact should take the form of inquiries or informational interviews. In all of your conversations with established and new contacts, let them know that you are hoping to obtain advice, suggestions, ideas and information. Do NOT use these initial meetings or correspondences to ask for a job.

Set up appointments with attorneys whose practice areas are of interest to you. Prepare specific questions in advance and come prepared with an updated copy of your resume, and if possible send your resume to them in advance. Carefully research their organization and be prepared to discuss their practice area intelligently.

When you arrive for a networking appointment with a new contact, remember that you requested this meeting, and at least in theory, it is not a job interview. You are seeking

advice, suggestions and information; therefore, you should initially direct the conversation. Use this meeting to:

- Make a Strong Impression
- Elicit Information
- Learn of Potential Openings
- Request the Names of Additional Contacts or Sources

### **3. Continuing Correspondence**

Keep in touch with your contacts. Send “thank you” notes to those with whom you have had meetings or helpful correspondence. Touch base with those whom you met at professional receptions, speaking engagements and the like.

#### **NETWORKING DO’S & DO NOT’S**

*(\*Based on material available in the publication Student Lawyer, March 2001 by Donna Gerson)*

#### **Before Approaching a Networking Prospect**

- Approach networking as a process to gather information. Never ask directly for a job on an initial contact.
- Begin your correspondence with the connection you want to highlight (e.g., “So-and-so suggested I contact you...”).
- Whether you correspond by regular mail or e-mail, make sure your introductory message is concise and free of typos.
- Have a resume available (but do not furnish it with your initial correspondence or contact.)

#### **When You Meet Your Networking Prospect**

- Set the agenda and come prepared with questions intended to spur easy conversation. Do not ambush your networking contact by turning the meeting into an adversarial interview.
- First impressions count! Ask about appropriate attire. If the office is in business casual mode, you should follow suit (and avoid a suit). Otherwise, dress in traditional office attire.
- Remain friendly, but not familiar. Do not feel that you are entitled to anything other than an information-gathering meeting.

#### **After Meeting Your Networking Prospect**

- Be prompt with your thank-you note and follow up with all subsequent contacts suggested by the networking contact. Your networking web will begin to expand quickly if you follow up on all leads.
- Keep your networking contact apprised of your progress. One good strategy is to clip relevant articles to send to contacts with a thoughtful note.

- Help others in need in the future. Think of networking as a “give-and-take” rather than a “winner-take-all” experience. Consider it a privilege to help another person achieve his or her dreams. Your good work likely will come back to you!

## **PREPARATION OF DOCUMENTATION; TARGETED MAILINGS**

The successful LL.M. job applicant must prepare a variety of written materials. The materials required for your job search include a resume, cover letter, transcripts (J.D., LL.M. and undergraduate), a list of references and a writing sample. Some employers, such as some international organizations, might require a personal statement or statement of interest

One of the many differences between J.D. and LL.M. recruiting is that you should never again do a mass mailing. All of your correspondence with potential employers should be targeted to a specific firm, person, position, or job announcement. During the fall semester, devote time, energy and effort to developing a list of potential employers that meet your personal goals and specifications.

## **RECOMMENDED LEGAL CAREER PLANNING BOOKS**

*\* Note that all the following resources are available in the OCS library.*

- America's Best Places to Work With a Law Degree, Kimm Walton
- Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams, Kimm Walton
- Guide to Law Specialties, National Association for Law Placement
- J.D. Preferred: 600 Plus Things You Can Do With a Law Degree, Federal Reports
- Lawful Pursuit: Careers in Public Interest Law, Ron Fox
- What Can You Do With a Law Degree? Deborah Arron
- The Lawyer's Career Change Handbook: More Than 300 Things You Can Do With a Law Degree, Hindi Greenberg
- The Legal Career Guide: From Law Student to Lawyer, Gary A. Munneke
- What Color Is Your Parachute? Richard Nelson Bolles
- Should You Really Be A Lawyer?: The Guide To Smart Career Choices Before, During & After Law School, Deborah Schneider