

Introduction to the Legal Academy

by Robin West

Introduction

The overwhelming majority of law students both at Georgetown and elsewhere enter law school intending to become lawyers. A growing number of our students, however, decide at some point during or after law school that they might want to become a law professor, either after or instead of practicing law, for at least a part of their professional lives. Most of these students or graduates reach this conclusion simply because they enjoyed the law school experience more than they thought they would. They excelled on their law journal, both as a writer and an editor. They enjoyed seminars, and want to do more intensive legal scholarship. They find the classroom experience exciting, and hope to engage it more fully, as a teacher rather than a student. They loved participating in a clinic, and want to create similar experiences for future students. They find law to be an interesting field of study. For whatever reasons, some law students and graduates begin to seriously contemplate the possibility of teaching law at some point in their careers.

If you find yourself in this group, then this page is designed for you. Until relatively recently, law schools did very little to help their graduates enter the legal academy, either by way of career guidance, or opportunities for advanced study.

This is now changing rapidly. There are now a number of programs, fellowships, and advanced degree programs established at various law schools whose sole purpose is to ease lawyers into the legal academy. This page and these comments are intended to answer some basic questions you might have on how to embark on such a career, and then to point you to some additional sources that might be helpful as well.

First: Do you really want to be a law professor?

The first question to ask yourself is whether you really want to be a law professor. Please be advised: since 1950 or thereabouts, the legal academy has embraced both a teaching and scholarship-focused model of what it means to be a legal academic. High quality, energetic, engaged, exciting teaching is highly valued in the academy. Law schools expect very good to excellent teaching from their faculty, and they generally get it. In addition, law schools also expect and value thoughtful, provocative, disciplined, high quality legal scholarship from their faculty – and again, they generally get it. At most law schools, it is expected that law professors will spend about half of their professional time on their teaching and about half on their scholarship. This is reflected in both hiring and tenure criteria, virtually everywhere, and is true of clinical and non-clinical teachers alike.

As a law student or recent graduate, you have become fairly familiar with the “teaching” part of the law professor’s life by the time you graduate: after all, you have been on the receiving end of it for three years. Students are not so familiar with the scholarly part of a law professor’s life – except what you may have gleaned from your service on a law review. Yet, scholarship is as

large a part of the law professor's identity as teaching. As discussed below, it plays an outsized role in hiring: many appointments committees now look only at the files of candidates who list published articles on their resumes. Scholarly productivity plays a role approximately equal to that of high quality teaching in the tenure process. And it plays a prominent role in promotions and salaries. The scholarly output of a faculty in

turn is highly determinative in the "ranking" of a law school, and in its general reputation among law schools.

Therefore, to know whether you want to "teach," you must also determine whether the scholarly life, and not just the pedagogical life, is right for you. Do you enjoy reading and learning about law? Have you already written sporadically on legal topics for publication, and have you enjoyed doing so? Have you enjoyed the process of writing and editing and publishing a student note, or has it been a chore? Are you, simply, curious about law? Do you want to learn more about legal scholarship, legal theory, legal philosophy, and the history of legal thought? Do you have some interest in various interdisciplinary movements in law, from law and economics, to law and culture, legal history, legal philosophy, or law and humanities? Most important, and most telling: do you have ideas and arguments and insights that you feel a genuine desire to articulate, to spell out, to share with an audience? To quote Bob Dylan, do you have "a headful of ideas that are driving [you] insane?" If you do, you're part of the way there. If you don't, you need to re-evaluate whether this career path is a good one for you. Scholarship is a large part of the legal academic life both before and after tenure, in both clinical and classroom settings, from the first year on the job to the last. If you enjoy the scholarly life, you will enjoy that aspect of the legal academy. If you don't enjoy it – if you are really only interested in teaching law, and consider the scholarship "requirement" for hiring or for tenure a necessary evil, or the dues you have to pay – the career will be a struggle.

Much the same can be said of teaching. If you enjoy teaching, this career makes sense for you, but if you don't – if you are really only interested in writing and publishing, and consider teaching the dues you're willing to pay for the opportunity to write freely – then again, this career might be a struggle. So – do you enjoy teaching? Even if you love the idea of writing about law in a scholarly way, if you dread the very idea of standing in front of a large classroom and teaching law, then again, you may want to re-evaluate. Law professors teach a lot. Most law professors teach at least one and often more than one large high demand course – either a first year course, such as contracts or torts, or a second year large class, such as corporations, evidence, income tax, or constitutional law. Additionally, most law professors also teach seminars or small classes on specialized topics. It is important to enjoy both the large classroom dynamic and teaching in smaller settings, including one-on-one close tutorial types of teaching. You will be doing a lot of both. The preparation for teaching both large high volume courses and small seminars is highly demanding and labor intensive. And, be advised: law professors, unlike your undergraduate professors, grade all papers and exams ourselves. We do not employ teaching assistants.

Lastly, teaching is collegial. We are not loners. Law professors increasingly engage in joint efforts, both as scholars and teachers. Law faculties largely govern themselves through

committees that can often place large demands on your time. It helps, then, to enjoy these sorts of joint, collaborative efforts.

Second: Are you qualified to be a law professor?

Lets assume you're right to be thinking of this career path – that it would be a good fit for your inclinations, passions, and habits of mind. Are you qualified? Is this a realistic goal?

It is, alas, still true that the majority of law professors come from a handful of “top” ranked schools. The traditional trajectory into teaching is to earn very high grades (or the equivalent) from a top law school such as Harvard, Yale or Stanford, serve with distinction on the law review, secure a plum judicial clerkship and then enter the legal academy. It is also clearly true, though, that this traditional trajectory is no longer the only route into teaching, and that the ranks of “feeder” schools that regularly place their graduates in the legal academy have broadened. Georgetown has become increasingly successful in placing our own graduates in law teaching. Conversely, possessing the traditional qualifications – prestigious law degree, top grades, law review experience and prestigious clerkship – is no longer itself a guarantee of entry into the profession. The traditional criteria still matter. But they are no longer either necessary or sufficient for securing a job as a law teacher.

Appointments committees at virtually all law schools now look at a wide array of qualifications, and not simply the rank of the JD- granting school, GPA or class rank, and the prestige value of the judicial clerkship. One way to put the point is that committees are increasingly looking directly at “hard evidence” predictors of scholarly and teaching ability, rather than at proxies for those abilities. This is overall a very good thing and has likely improved the quality of the legal academy. “Can you teach?” and “can you write?” are simply more important questions for entering law professors than “where did you go to school?” “what was your GPA?” and “did you serve on law review?” But it does shift the burden, so to speak, to the candidate to demonstrate these qualifications. A record of high scholastic achievement at a good school will likely not be sufficient, any more than it is necessary.

So what are these qualifications?

The most important of the “expanded criteria” at least at many schools and certainly the top schools, is the existence of scholarly publications. Having high quality publications in good law reviews is therefore, today, as important as the Harvard degree or the Supreme Court clerkship might have been thirty years ago. It is also helpful to also have manuscripts accepted for publication, or manuscripts under consideration at law reviews, or publishable drafts, or works in progress, and (discussed in more detail below) a “research agenda” of future scholarly work. But be forewarned: published articles are very much the coin of the realm. If you have one, two or three high quality publications in good journals, you are for that reason alone well qualified for the teaching market. If you have no publications, even a high GPA and excellent clerkship might not suffice: many appointments committees now look *only* at those applicants with publications. Some schools may regard publishable drafts that are in circulation as a sufficient substitute, and virtually all will regard drafts that have been accepted for publication as the equivalent of

published articles. But generally speaking, it's fair to say that a published article is now de facto required for the legal academic job market.

Evidence that one is interested in and good at teaching is also helpful – although much harder to accumulate before the first job, and certainly harder to document in any event, than evidence of interest in and ability to produce good scholarship. However, if there is a record of teaching law or related topics at a high level, this will matter – as will good teaching evaluations that show that the teaching was successful. For those who have never taught, a fluent and engaging academic presentation at their “job talk” will help persuade faculties that the candidate can succeed in the classroom; a poorly thought-out or poorly delivered job talk can doom a candidacy in the eyes of faculty members asking themselves whether this person can handle a rigorous teaching load. Again, the general point is simply that law school appointments committees are increasingly moving away from the traditional qualifications –the rank of the JD law school, high GPA, class rank, and clerkship – and are looking instead to “hard evidence” of ability to teach and write.

Third, evidence of exemplary performance in practice is important to many hiring committees, particularly for some legal specialties (less so for others). For better or for worse, exceptionally fine work as a lawyer has never been part of the traditional criteria, and for the most part, it is still not regarded as a necessary condition for entering the legal academy. It is, though, something that schools will look at, although in some fields more than others. Supreme Court advocacy has long been highly regarded as good practice experience for academic work. Exceptionally fine work in tax, corporate law, or “deals” types of business practice will set you apart if you wish to teach some form of business or tax law.

So – publications, teaching experience, and exceptional success in practice increasingly are coming to replace the traditional reliance on grades, the status of the JD granting school, class rank, law review, and judicial clerkship as criteria for entering teaching. This statement, however, requires significant qualification. The traditional indicators do still matter – they are simply no longer rigid, absolutely necessary, minimal qualifiers. But they matter in other ways. Let me explain.

Start with grades. It is true that many appointments committees no longer look at GPAs at all, much less simply disqualify those below a certain floor. (This is in part because GPAs and ranks aren't as easily compiled as they once were: a number of schools use honors, high honors, etc. rather than grades, and most schools now at least report that they do not rank the class.) But it is not true that “grades don't matter.” For example, grades do matter – and matter a lot – to the admissions committees of various graduate schools, and they also matter, a lot, to law schools making decisions about admittance to fellowships or Visiting Assistant Professor programs – programs which are designed to help promising people prepare for the teaching market who have no publications in hand. So although grades won't be as much of a barrier at the appointments stage as they once were, they matter hugely in the “preparation” stage – they matter to those making admissions decisions into various programs that will help you prepare to enter the academy. And, truly poor grades will disqualify applicants at most law schools, increased skepticism about the value of grades as a predictor notwithstanding. Likewise, very high grades will matter somewhat to appointments committees everywhere. Lastly, there are some

appointments committees at some schools that continue to pour over transcripts of applicants, along the lines of the “discarded” traditional model.

Similarly, it is no longer necessary that one graduate from a “top” law school; this is simply not an iron-clad pre-condition of teaching. But this doesn’t mean that the status or rank of the JD-granting school doesn’t matter at all. It still helps to have a degree from a top school, and it is still harder to enter the academy with a degree from a school further down the ranks. There are also indirect ways in which the rank of the degree-granting school matters. References from established, well-known scholars do matter to appointments committees, and quite a bit. Most of those established, known scholars tend to teach at top law schools. Although it is not essential that one have received a JD from such a school, it is extremely helpful to have established mentor-mentee relationships with individuals who teach there. A fellowship or a graduate degree in law (or some other discipline) from a top school can not only better train you, but it can also help you establish these relationships.

Finally, take all claims about “trends in hiring,” including those made above, with a grain of salt. Remember that there are over two hundred law schools that are AALS accredited, and they have different needs and emphases in their hiring. Some law schools (a minority) continue to hire junior professors with excellent academic records as law students, and will look at little else. Some don’t put as much weight on the academic record and will look only at publications. Some want to hire individuals who have excelled or made a mark as lawyers, and will not be as interested in either law school performance or publications as they are in your accomplishments in practice. And of course at plenty of law schools, it’s a muddle – they look at all of these things, with no clear algorithm or method for making these essentially predictive judgments.

So, let me put all of this together and bring it home, so to speak. If you graduated from Georgetown at the very top of your class, served in a titled position on the Law Journal (EIC or articles editor), performed well in a prestigious Judicial Clerkship, and have published one or two or more well-received articles in highly regarded journals, you are already exceptionally well qualified for the teaching market. If you graduated from Georgetown (or will soon do so) with good to very good grades, served on a law review, worked as a judicial clerk or in practice or intend to do so, have published a law review article or note in any journal at all, or have a high quality work-in-progress on your hard drive – perhaps a left over unfinished note or seminar paper – and you very much want to be a law professor, then you should definitely consider a career in law teaching, but be forewarned that it will take some preparation, some hard work, and a bit of luck to get there. If you graduated with middling grades, eschewed the journals, have not published or written, but have already had a distinguished career in practice, have done a good bit of successful teaching as an adjunct professor of law which you really enjoyed, and you very much want to make the move to full time teaching, it might be worth your while to consider a career in law teaching, but it will take a lot of preparation, a lot of hard work, and more than a little luck.

Third: What should you do now while you’re in law school to better prepare yourself for the teaching market later?

If you are still a student, the answer is very simple: write. Write and publish a student note on a law journal. Take seminars that interest you, and write high quality seminar papers, and then go ahead and publish them. Do “independent research” with teachers you have come to respect, and from whom you can profit from critical feedback. Write thoughtful memoranda for professors for whom you work as a research assistant. Write for yourself. Write in your spare time. Write op-eds for newspapers on legal subjects. Write for publication, even without the spur of law review requirements or seminar deadlines. Write as much as you can.

Second, do try to take interdisciplinary courses and seminars that will expose you to some of the most important ideas in current legal theory and scholarship. Law professors for the most part share a common base of knowledge not only regarding legal doctrine (torts, contracts, constitutional law, etc.) but also some basic, foundational ideas that have come to matter, over the last half century or so, in the legal- scholarly community.

By the time you graduate, you will want to share this “legal-cultural literacy.” You will want to know, for example, the difference between legal formalism and legal realism, both in their historical setting and more generally. You should understand basic economic terminology, such as the meaning of efficiency, agency costs, path-dependence, and prisoner’s dilemmas. Of course you should understand how the Warren Court differed from those that went before and followed it, and you should have a better-than- daily- newspaper-appreciation of what originalism and non-originalism mean in the context of constitutional debates. It makes sense to ask of law professors that they appreciate at least what John Rawls, Robert Nozick, and a handful of other major public intellectuals have thought that justice requires of our basic legal institutions. It helps to know what people mean when they distinguish formal from substantive equality, and it helps to have a decent general idea of what a market equilibrium is, and to know more or less what Professor Horwitz meant when he talked of the mid-19th century “transformation” of American law . . . and so on. Some of this “basic legal-cultural literacy” you learned as an undergraduate, much of this you likely picked up in first year courses.

You can’t do everything in three short years with a limited access to seminars and courses. But at least aim to acquire a basic literacy in a few ideas in legal history, law and economics, and legal philosophy, as well as in legal doctrine. If you don’t have time to take the seminars or basic interdisciplinary courses that will provide you this education, you can always obtain the reading lists and acquire it on your own.

But if you can, take one or two or more interdisciplinary seminars. You will learn a lot, and if nothing else you will at least discover whether these ideas matter to you, and how much.

Beyond that, there’s not much you should do, in law school, that is any different from what you would do to simply prepare for a general legal practice. If you can take the seminars suggested above, do so. Other than that, simply take courses that interest you. You do not need to develop a “specialty” in an area of law. Your elective classes and seminars should be “interest-driven” not “career-driven.” If you know you want to be a law professor, and you are still in law school, then take the most interesting classes you can find, and immerse yourself in the materials.

And – study for exams and do as well as you can. Write and publish a student note. Work as a Research Assistant. Lastly -- attend any career events sponsored by GULC to talk with faculty about academic life! (Contact the law journal office for more information.)

Fourth: How do you apply for a job?

If you have decided that you want to be a law professor, and that you are basically qualified right now to pursue this path, what should you do?

Each October, the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) holds a Recruitment Conference at which job candidates have short interviews with small hiring committees from most law schools. In advance of this conference, AALS distributes to the hiring committees short-form applications, CVs, research agendas, and writing samples of every candidate who has registered with them— generally more than a thousand. These are distributed to all law schools, and their hiring committees spend much of August and September choosing who they will interview at the Recruitment Conference. Anyone can register at any time with the AALS and be included in their distribution of resumes of interested applicants to all AALS-affiliated law schools, in preparation for the annual Recruitment Conference, although there is a sizeable fee (and a process for need-based fee waiver). To register, simply go to the AALS web page and download the recruitment form. The form is basically an abbreviated resume. Fill it out and send it in. Your form along with other submitted materials will be included in the next distribution of forms to all law schools. If a law school wishes to interview you at the upcoming recruitment conference they will contact you.

Feel free to call the the office of the Associate Dean for Research at GULC and he or she we will direct you to faculty members who can give you counseling on how best to present yourself in the AALS form. If you register with the AALS, be prepared to attend the hiring conference held over a two day period in Washington DC every fall. Schools will schedule half hour interviews with individuals they hope to meet. After the conference, the schools' appointments committees will invite back a few applicants to meet their entire faculties and some students. These call-back interviews involve a full day of interviews with small groups of faculty at a time, a meeting with the Dean, and a job talk to the entire faculty. The job talk is a half hour lecture on any topic of your choice, followed by about a half hour question and answer session. (These times vary widely from school to school; the Q and A can be an hour, and the presentation limited to twenty minutes.) After the call-backs are complete, the law schools vote to extend offers and the offers are then made by the deans to the candidates. The AALS meeting is typically in mid to late October, and the offers are typically made in January, February, or March. The entire process then runs several months.

If you decide to register for the AALS recruitment conference, do let us know right away. Call, email or write the Associate Dean for Research at GULC when and if you register with AALS. That individual will direct you to faculty members on a committee we have created specifically to help our alumni on the teaching market. We will “moot” both interviews and job talks for you, by bringing together a small group of faculty or fellows who will hear your job talk, and ask you questions, so that you will be comfortable in both formats. These moots are extremely important, if only because they can highlight for you the need for further practice. And, we will be happy to

advise you regarding how to fill out the AALS form, present yourself in a CV or resume, and how to put together a “research agenda.”

Second, if you decide to go on the job market, you should consider sending out “packets” of materials to all schools where you might want to interview. Do this in addition to filling out and submitting the AALS form. These “packets” can be mailed to appointments committees (or chairs, if you know the names, or the Deans of the law schools) at any time, but they typically go out late summer or very early fall. The packet should include an extended resume, copies of all published writing and drafts in progress, a “research agenda” and a cover letter. By “extended resume” is meant a document that fully describes all relevant experience (not just short job titles). “Published writing” means just that – all reprints, all drafts, all manuscripts. The cover letter should indicate your reasons for interest in the school to which the packet is sent.

The “Research Agenda” requires a bit more explanation. A research agenda is typically a two to four page document that describes in some detail a couple of research projects that are “on the horizon.” It doesn’t have any particular form, and does not need to be particularly formal. Just write a couple of paragraphs about the next couple of topics you envision developing in future scholarship. The Research Agenda should reassure the reader that you are interested in publishing and writing “over the long haul” and not just until you finish current works in progress. Ideally, the RA should also present you as a scholar with a couple deep ideas that can in turn generate a number of related projects. Minimally, it should convey the message that you are a serious scholar, very interested in the world of ideas, and anxious to continue to put pen to paper.

Third, when you go on the market, be sure to contact individual faculty here at Georgetown who you think can serve as references. Faculty references are a very important part of the hiring process. Don’t be reluctant to pick up the phone and make those calls. You are not asking for a “personal favor” when you ask for a faculty member’s recommendation, this is very much part of our job. If we cannot give the recommendation for any reason we will certainly let you know.

If you would like to be a law professor, but have determined that you should further prepare for the market, what should you do?

If you decide that you do want to be a professor, but that your qualifications need further development, there are a number of things you can do to better prepare to enter the academic job market at some point in the future.

If you wish to keep you current job while preparing to enter the academy at some future time:

First, while you keep your current job, try to write one or even better two articles, in the evenings or on weekends. Get the articles published. This, with nothing else, is the most important thing you can do to drastically improve your prospects.

Second, you might want to consider teaching as an adjunct, at a local law school. Schools with night programs especially will be very grateful for your show of interest, and will work with you to find a good fit of courses, times, and student enrollments. Please note, however: adjunct

teaching is not *generally* regarded by hiring committees as a significant factor in evaluating your candidacy. It *will* though help you decide whether this is something you want to do full-time and whether you enjoy it. And the above warning notwithstanding, good evaluations will definitely help you build a record of demonstrated ability in the classroom.

If you are willing to change jobs, and residence:

If you can move and give up your current job, there are a number of paths you can take to better prepare yourself to enter the legal academy.

Fellowships. If you can afford it, and if you are mobile, you should consider applying for a fellowship either at GULC or at another top law school. Fellowships are now offered at a couple dozen excellent law schools, including GULC. They typically pay a substantial stipend – not the equivalent of high paying practice but enough to live on. The point of most of these fellowships is to help very talented law graduates get into teaching, primarily by giving them plenty of time to write. Fellowships also typically pair fellows with faculty mentors who will work closely on writing projects with you. And, most fellowships (not all), give you plenty of opportunities to teach: either as a guest teacher, a co-teacher, or in some cases, a full class or seminar.

In the minds of many current faculty, including the author of this essay, fellowships are now the best way – and are certainly the fastest growing way – to prepare for a teaching career.

They don't cost you anything, and generally pay a modest salary. They give you maximal exposure to faculty who are typically very happy to help you become a law professor. And the basic point of the fellowship is to give you lots and lots of time to write – and time to write is an incredibly valuable commodity. If you can do so, by all means investigate as many fellowships as you can find, and apply to a goodly number of them – they are increasingly quite competitive. They are specifically designed to help people get into teaching who should be in teaching, but for any number of reasons, have not had the time or opportunity to do substantial writing and publishing. If this sounds like you, by all means apply for a fellowship.

Graduate Legal Degrees. Second, if you don't want to pursue the fellowship route, you might look at the possibility of obtaining a graduate degree in law. A number of top schools (currently, not including GULC) now offer LL.M.s, S.J.D.s or Ph.D.s for U.S. lawyers who wish to become law professors. The specialized program is then designed to help lawyers prepare to do so. The class work is geared toward preparing teachers, and in all of these programs there is plenty of time to write a thesis, which should become a publishable and then published article. Of course, LL.M., Ph.D. or S.J.D. degrees, like all degrees, cost tuition and living expenses. Some schools waive the tuition and will pay a stipend, if the graduate student is willing to teach legal research and writing, or help out with the JD program in some other way.

PhDs in Other Disciplines. Third, if you have a passionate interest, and can afford it, by all means consider pursuing a graduate degree in a field that can be profitably joined with the JD degree. Law schools are very interested in hiring new professors with joint degrees in law and economics, law and history, or law and philosophy, or law and various empirical social sciences, such as anthropology or sociology or political science. Law and humanities is a growing

interdisciplinary field, and combined degrees in law and literature, cultural studies, American studies, women's studies, and so on, can also well position you on the market. Be advised, though, that these newer law/humanities interdisciplinary

fields are not as well developed, and possibly not as marketable, as either law and economics, legal history, or law and philosophy, all of which are still going strong.

One word of caution. A PhD is a huge commitment of time, energy, and resources. It is also a process of socialization into a distinct profession, with its own mores, commitments, ways of thinking and even ways of being. It confers an identity as well as training, as does a law degree. Do not consider getting a PhD in another discipline solely for the purpose of getting a law teaching job. Only pursue a PhD in some other field if you have a strong, passionate interest in that other field, and if you could easily envision yourself working in that discipline. A PhD might help you on the law teaching market – it probably will. But it might not, particularly if you never complete it. The chance that a PhD might help you get a law teaching job is not a sufficient reason by itself to make such a profound commitment of your time and money and interest.

Visiting Assistant Professorships (or VAPs). Note that a number of schools are now hiring “Visiting Assistant Professors,” by which is meant a professor not on tenure track, with a one or two year appointment, and often an understanding that the VAP will not be considered for an appointment by the school that offered the VAP in the first place. This gives individuals interested in entering the legal academy a chance to teach, ideally some time to do some writing, and acquire some familiarity with the ins and outs of the legal academy. It gives the school the chance to fill curricular needs without making a permanent, tenure track appointment, and perhaps to burnish the school's reputation as a place that well prepares potential professors for legal academia. The VAP typically teaches one course less than regular faculty, does not have to serve on committees, and has full access to all of the support and culture of regular faculty – faculty workshops, staff assistance, etc.

These VAP positions can be very helpful for some people, and less so for others. The danger is that the potential VAP underestimates how much sheer time is required to prepare and teach a course for the first time. Teaching a full load in the first year of teaching leaves very little time for the sustained reading, thinking and writing and re-writing required to produce a first piece of substantial scholarship. If the VAP is also doing a job search – going to AALS, going on call-backs, etc. – the VAP position can turn out to be a bit of a curse. If you look for a VAP position, be sure that the position gives less than a full teaching load, and is designed in such a way as to give you time to write. Also be sure you understand ahead of time whether there is any rule regarding whether you will or won't be considered a candidate at that school. These can be wonderful opportunities for people deciding whether to go into the legal academy. They can be less than ideal, however, for others, particularly for potential candidates who more than anything need time to write.

Note that as fellowships begin to offer teaching possibilities to their fellows, and as VAPs begin to cut back on the teaching responsibilities so as to guarantee more time to write, the difference between a fellowship and a VAP is shrinking.

Addendum of Clinical Teaching

Most of the above applies equally to the process of launching a career in clinical law teaching. At most (but not all) law schools the “clinical teaching track” is now “merged” with traditional teaching, meaning that clinical law professors (or clinicians, as they are still sometimes called) are held to the same teaching and scholarship standards as non-clinical professors, both at the hiring and tenure stages. Consequently, applicants for clinical positions are held to the same standards as applicants for non-clinical positions. There are however a few additional things to note, with respect to clinical teaching.

First, on the nature of the job itself: Do be advised that clinical professors teach long hours which are often unpredictable (unlike the hours of their nonclinical counterparts) and, also unlike their nonclinical counterparts, spend many hours engaged in one-on-one teaching of students. Clinical law professors must be prepared to work with students of varying skill levels to develop their own skills, and to challenge them to explore and embrace their professional identity. Are you truly interested in undertaking this work? Are you interested in putting your own lawyer identity on hold and focusing intently on the pedagogical needs of students? If not – if the thought of spending many hours helping one student prepare a simple case sounds simply dreadful – then perhaps you should re-think a career in clinical teaching. Likewise, if you are seeking a clinical position because you are tired of practice or wish to pursue a public interest law practice funded by a law school, you will find your life as a clinician disappointing. On the other hand, if you thrived in a public interest practice, enjoy teaching, found your clinic in law school exceptionally interesting, and particularly if you found the active, interactive and reflective learning processes stressed in those settings to be rewarding, you should by all means consider clinical teaching.

Second, on qualifications: For clinical teaching jobs the same criteria listed above pertain, but other criteria are also added into the mix. In addition to grades, publications, and other predictors like journal and clerking experience, your chances of being hired as a clinical professor increase significantly if you had a successful clinical experience at a top law school, have practiced or taught in a clinic, and are articulate about your pedagogical philosophy. And of course, if you are seeking a clinical position, demonstrated first rate lawyering skills will be absolutely essential to being hired. Your practice experience will often affect your qualifications for particular subject matter clinics and your success as a lawyer will inform decisions about your suitability to teach clinically.

And finally, one last note on what you might do to prepare yourself for the market, if you think you might be interested in clinical teaching somewhere down the line. In addition to the suggestions given above, you might also want to seek out an opportunity to teach or co-teach part-time in a clinic with a local law school before making the full plunge onto the job market. This will help you develop the pedagogical skills required of clinical teaching and experience the one-on-one “diagnostic” interaction that such teaching entails. It will also enable you to demonstrate to hiring committees that you are making an informed decision about choosing this career path. And it will help you be more articulate about the ways in which clinic is different from practice. Short of teaching in a clinic, you may want to agree to supervise law students in your practice to get experience that might be transferable to clinical teaching.

A Final Note on Other Career Paths

The above essay is intended for students and Georgetown alums interested in a standard, tenure-track, entry level teaching position in an accredited law school. Do note, however, that there are other ways to be involved in the enterprise of legal education, either as a full and challenging career, or for a few years, or during a limited sabbatical from your practice.

Undergraduate Teaching: Some colleges, universities, and community colleges will regard the JD degree as a sufficient credential for teaching undergraduate classes in constitutional law, business law, privacy law, or whatever is currently topical. (Universities and colleges that typically require a PhD for any sort of teaching, however, may not.) There are relatively few tenure track positions for these sorts of law-related positions. Schools in your area may however welcome you as a part time or full time instructor of these courses, or as a director of pre-law counseling programs.

Law School Administration. Law Schools often consider recent law school graduates as well as seasoned practitioners for administrative positions, typically at the Assistant Dean level. For example, Assistant Deans often run career services offices, oversee admissions, engage in JD counseling, and take responsibility for student life, wellness, and mental health programs. These administrators are not typically drawn from faculty ranks, rather, they are hired directly into these positions.

Legal Research and Writing. As discussed above, many law schools now have fellowship programs in which two-year fellows teach the One-L legal research and writing classes. Some law schools hire adjuncts for LRW instruction. A number of schools, however, have moved to a fully professionalized and integrated LRW faculty model. At those schools (GULC is one) LRW faculty are hired with the expectation on both sides that the position is a permanent one. Some of these schools use a traditional tenure model, and some a renewable contract model. But at many schools, and regardless of whether it is “tenure-track,” LRW is a recognized and highly regarded teaching specialty.

Experiential Learning Classes. All law schools now include far more experiential learning opportunities and classes in their curricula, than was true just ten years ago. These experiential learning opportunities often involve partnerships with a faculty member and a local practitioner. Such a course may have a “seminar” component in the school, and an “experiential” component in the legal office (of all sorts: private practice, government, public interest). You might contact law schools in your area and inquire, and then indicate your desire to help out with such a class.

High School Teaching. Don’t forget high schools! A JD is a good advanced degree for any number of traditional high school courses, and a number of high school administrators are looking for ways to interest their students in legal careers down the road.

Everybody:

If you are looking for a job as a law professor, or considering doing so, call or email us here at Georgetown Law and tell us, so that we can help you.

Wherever you are in your job search, or in your preparation, or in your decision-making about whether you wish to enter the legal academy, stay in touch with us here at Georgetown Law. We will be more than happy to talk to you about any aspect of your job search, or whether the career is a good one for you to consider, and at any point. Contact the Associate Dean's Office of Research and Academic Programs. We will either answer your questions, or direct you to someone who will.