

1L Job Search: Manage the Marathon, not the Sprint¹

Creating a career path is a marathon; searching for a 1L summer job in November can be a distracting, time-wasting sprint.

The sprint

NALP rules govern the sprint. 1Ls may apply to interested employers on and after December 1.

The sprint is for a limited number of jobs at large law firms. Based on the misguided assumption that employers are eager to receive them, thousands of 1Ls send out applications that large law firms receive on December 1. Few are processed without spring grades.

The risk: a relatively small number of 1Ls work for large law firms, and every minute spent on resume mail is a minute taken from studying for critical 1L finals. For good or ill, 1L grades matter for 2L and 3L applications for large law firms, prestigious clerkships, and highly competitive public sector fellowships. With fall grades in hand, most 1Ls find summer jobs during the spring at small firms, public agencies, and with government. You must calculate the risk of the sprint: unknown potential 1L employment vs. knowing that you did everything possible to get the grades you deserve.

The marathon

Managing your career is like managing a marathon. A smart candidate who will become a smart lawyer develops and nurtures a wide-ranging team consisting of:

1. Law school and undergraduate career services, alumni relations, faculty mentors, and alumni;
2. A professional network built in person and through social and professional networking; and
3. A growing constellation of friends and family.

Expect to have many conversations with your career advisor and other team members because you are building a set of relationships and learning about new opportunities. You are not on a blind-speed-date. The marathon timeline for 1Ls includes:

1. Check in with career services in November to:
 - Put a name and a face onto the staff.
 - Allow the staff to collect information that can be used to send specific information to you.
 - Share your interests, goals, and plans. You may change your mind as often as you change your socks, but you must share that information or your career advisors cannot assist you. Telepathy is not a job search tool.
 - Get winter break activities including bar association-sponsored events onto your calendar.
 - Learn about typical 1L summer activities and the spring recruiting calendar.
2. Create a resume for your Thanksgiving Strategy. To be prepared when someone says "Send me a resume," add law school to your current resume and have it reviewed by career services. You will distribute this when you are

¹ Taken from lawyerist.com, written by Susan Gainen on October 26, 2010

“home” for Thanksgiving. Poll your friends and family for names and contact information for lawyers and other professionals who you will contact after finals.

3. After finals, check back with Career Services and identify one area of law or non-traditional career path that interests you enough to read about it for two hours. If you are still interested after this research, ask career services or alumni relations for the names of two people who work in that area. Call them. Shadow them. Observe what they do. Listen to what they say. Evaluate what you have learned. Repeat as necessary throughout law school, until you find something that might make you want to get out of bed and go to work.

Do not expect to get a job or to create a life-time career plan in a 20-minute meeting. Creating a career path is a series of blind dates combined with complex research projects. Just as you would never discuss baby names or china patterns on a first social date, you should not expect virtual strangers to read your mind, know your values, goals and plans, and create something for you out of whole cloth after just 20 minutes.

After the first semester, take a break after finals. A real break, with good friends, good food and fun. Read a novel. Play video games. Go to movies. Do not study.