

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF LAW
EVENING STUDENT SUPPLEMENT
Adapted from Pace University School of Law

A. The Evening Student's Job Search

While all law students have quite a bit of work in store for them, students in the Evening Division have an even harder task ahead. In addition to handling your academic responsibilities, many of you have families and are also holding down a full-time job. To this mix, you will have to add one more important task, namely, planning for your career in the law. Please read the information below which pertains to evening students in particular.

Individuals make the decision to attend law school for a wide variety of reasons. Some are fully intent on practicing law in the traditional sense of representing clients by going to court, drafting legal documents and assisting them with business transactions, for example. Others, however, have no intention of practicing law in this traditional sense. Instead, their goal is to earn an additional degree which will allow them to work outside of their present career or simply to make themselves more marketable in their current professions. Regardless of your career goals, you will need to acquire career building skills and utilize these skills throughout your lifetime. In addition, it is important that you take action that will lead you in the direction you choose, including the choice of courses you take, the kind of work experience you obtain, joining a journal and taking part in extra-curricular activities.

1. Obtain Legal Experience Before Graduation

Too many law students, both evening and day, assume that once they have obtained their law degree, doors will immediately fly open and welcome them with huge paychecks, because, after all, they are lawyers now! Given the current supply of lawyers, however, the legal world no longer works that way, assuming it ever did at all. While many of you have distinguished yourselves in your present or prior careers in business, the arts, politics, human services and academia, legal employers look for candidates who have practical legal experience when they consider who to hire for future full-time legal employment. You must, therefore, develop creative strategies that will enable you to obtain legal experience with a law firm, in a corporate legal department, within a judge's chambers, in a legal services organization, or with some other legal employer.

A number of your predecessors have obtained practical legal experience in a variety of creative ways. Some have worked as legal interns at night, on weekends, or by devoting one full work day a week to a legal position. Some have taken a leave of absence during the summer months to obtain legal experience. Others have made a complete transition to a full-time legal position. While some of these ideas may appear extreme, the cost of not getting practical experience during your law school career is a price that few of you will be happy to pay - feeling "stuck" in

your present career in spite of all the time and money that you have invested in attending law school to effect your desired career change.

2. Anticipate and Plan for a Change in Your Financial Situation

Many students in the Evening Division often enjoy salaries in the middle to high five figure range, after having worked for several years in their present full-time professions. When becoming new members of the legal profession, such students often face a pay cut during their first few years of law practice. Consequently, it is important that you plan as early as possible during your law school careers for the possibility of a lower salary in your early postgraduate legal positions.

3. Common Evening Student Myths

MYTH: I can wait until I graduate from law school before I start the job search process.

FACT: Legal employers seek graduates who have acquired practical legal skills in "real life" settings, such as in internships and clerkships, before they graduate. As such, it is incumbent upon you to get this experience during law school. Moreover, certain legal employers (such as large law firms) actually make hiring decisions one to two years before a student graduates.

MYTH: The elective courses that I want to take to prepare me for my legal career are just not available when I want to take them.

FACT: The best way to ensure that you are able to take the elective courses of interest to you is to plan ahead. Engage in self-assessment to determine your area(s) of interest and the classes you will need to take to meet your goals, and plan your schedule accordingly. See your registration materials for further information.

MYTH: I can wait until after graduation to engage in self-assessment and networking.

FACT: Only by engaging in self-assessment early in your law school career will you be able to plan ahead to take the courses you wish and obtain the experience you need. Similarly, networking is a long-term process. The earlier you start, the larger and more effective your network of professional contacts will be. Many evening students can utilize the people they know in their current profession to help them meet and develop relationships with attorneys practicing in their area of interest.

MYTH: I already have a resume so I do not need to have it reviewed by the Career Services Office.

FACT: Most evening students have a quality business resume that is appropriate for their current profession. They do not, however, have a resume that is appropriate for the legal profession. Our office can assist you in revising your resume to highlight skills of interest to legal employers and make the format appropriate for the legal market.

MYTH: I have no legal experience, so no legal employer will be interested in hiring me.

FACT: Even if you have no actual legal experience, chances are good that you have other experience that demonstrates skills that are transferable to a legal setting. Our counselors can help you to create a resume that highlights these transferable skills.

MYTH: I work full time! There is no way that I can do an internship, work full-time, and go to school at night! It just cannot be done! Besides, I have too much coursework, business and family commitments to worry about what I will do when I graduate. I don't need to think about looking for a legal job until after I graduate.

FACT: There is no question that acquiring legal experience is difficult for evening students. Nonetheless, because such experience is so important to your being able to successfully obtain legal employment after graduation, it is necessary to find creative ways to obtain this experience. Consider these options: find a way to perform legal work at night, on weekends, by taking some annual leave from your present position or by taking a job in the legal field full-time. For example, particular courses focusing on particular skills, or conducting research for a professor, will help build your resume and can fit into your schedule.

MYTH: Career Services programs and counselors are not available at times that are convenient for me.

FACT: The Career Services Office is open until 6 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and until 5 p.m. on Fridays. In addition, a counselor will make appointments with you outside these hours to accommodate your schedule. Career Services presentations that are given during the day are recorded so that evening students can access them at their convenience. Many local bar associations hold functions on week-nights and weekends. These provide excellent networking forums.

MYTH: I plan to stay with my current employer after graduation, therefore I don't need career services, a new resume or legal experience.

FACT: Many students, although intending to stay with current employers after graduation, find a whole new world awaits them. Additionally, in bad financial times employers might experience lay-offs, closings, etc. All students must prepare for this and make sure they have taken advantage of all that is offered.

MYTH: Employers are not attracted to older students or feel threatened by second career law students.

FACT: To the contrary, employers feel more confident in hiring someone that may be older or has had a successful prior career because these students bring a higher maturity level, a wealth of life experience, and the ability to handle responsibility. This is what you, as an evening student, should focus on and promote during the interview.

B. Steps to Take Now for Your Job Search

The most important step you can take to begin the process of planning your legal career is to set aside the time now to do so. As evening students, you will find out that time is often your enemy. The way to befriend this enemy, however, is to learn how to carefully manage and treat it, which, incidentally, is critical to a successful career as a practicing attorney. At the outset of your law school career it is important to set aside time to take the following important steps in planning for your legal career:

1. Attend Career Services panels, seminars, and Bar Association Programs:

Hear from alumni and practicing attorneys, and ask for their advice and how they obtained their positions;

2. Develop Relationships with Your Fellow Classmates:

The evening student body includes students with a rich and diverse array of experiences and backgrounds. The woman sitting next to you in class may be the Vice-President of a major investment bank you are interested in targeting in your job search. Do not fail to take advantage of this valuable resource;

3. Consider Switching to a Legal Job Before Your Final Year of Law School:

Use the Career Services online job bank to view recent listings. For students wishing to practice in large law firms, remember that these employers give a lot of weight to grades, law review or other journal experience and moot court. Large law firms tend to hire from their summer programs. As an evening student, you will need to apply for large law firm positions in the Summer/Fall of your 2L year for summer associate positions following your 2L year (i.e. one full year prior to employment). Since the summer associate pool is one from which large legal employers hire most or all of their permanent associates, it is imperative to perform a targeted mailing and participate in job fairs and Texas A&M's On-Campus Interview Program in the fall if you are interested in a position with a large employer. Large law firms typically pay summer associates a pro rata salary of a 1st year associate. There have been occasions where these employers have kept summer associates on beyond the summer and throughout the year, offering benefits and making it worth your while to leave your current full-time position to take a summer associate position.

4. Explore Opportunities at Your Current Workplace:

If your current employer has a general counsel or in-house legal department, ask about taking assignments after regular business hours or shadowing company lawyers on your day off to learn about their jobs. You can also find lawyers working in the human resources and contract compliance departments. You can include these short assignments as legal experience on your resume. Be sure to describe them accurately on your resume, in cover letters, and in your job interviews.

5. Explore the Possibility of Taking a Leave of Absence From Your Current Position:

This has been done especially during the summer following your third year. By planning for a leave of absence, you can build your savings to prepare yourself for a possible pay cut;

6. Develop a Relationship with the Career Services Office:

In the beginning of your second semester in law school, make an appointment to discuss your career goals with a Career Services counselor by calling (817) 212-4050 or by stopping by the front desk, and check in with us at least once every semester thereafter.

7. Participate in a Student Organization or Bar Association Committees:

Employers often take into account a student's involvement or leadership role in a student organization. It can be a way to demonstrate a credible interest in a certain area of practice, especially if you are not able to gain any practical legal experience in the area.

7. Consider Participating in Moot Court, Mock Trial, Law Review or the Law Clinic:

Participation in these activities gives law students the opportunity to enhance and develop important legal skills, such as research, writing, oral advocacy and litigation skills. These are skills employers are always seeking.

8. Specific Timetables to Be Aware of:

If you are interested in any of these permanent positions after graduation you must act early. The following are just some examples of employer deadlines to be aware of:

Employer	General Preferred Qualifications	Apply By:
Large Law Firms	Excellent academics/Law Review/Moot Court/Mock Trial	Summer/Fall of 2L year
Federal Judicial Clerkships	Excellent academics/Law Review/Moot Court/Mock Trial	Summer/Fall of 2L year
Highest State Court Judicial Clerkships	Excellent academics/Law Review/Moot Court/Mock Trial	Summer/Fall of 3L year
State Judicial Clerkships	Good academics/Law Review/Moot Court/Mock Trial or other relevant school or work experience	Summer/Fall of 3L year
District Attorney's Office	Mock Trial experience, demonstrated interest in Criminal Law	Fall of 2L year for summer positions, fall of 3L year for permanent positions (note that many offices do not hire until bar results are in)
Government Employers	Good academics/well-rounded/educational background that suits or demonstrated interest in agency or organization	Fall of 2L year for summer positions, fall of 3L year for Honors Attorney programs
Public Interest	Demonstrated interest in public service	Fall and spring of 2L year for summer positions
Small/Midsize Law Firms	Practical skills and experience, such as participation in Law Clinic, the Externship program, or working or volunteering for a practitioner or judge	Spring of 2L year for summer positions, spring of 3L year for permanent positions (note that working during the school year part-time is a good way to get in to a small firm)

C. Planning to Accelerate? Some Things You Need to Know Now

Many evening law students take extra courses during the semester and summer and therefore end up accelerating their anticipated date of graduation. If you are planning to do this, please come and see a counselor as soon as possible to discuss the career opportunities that you may miss out on by virtue of graduating early.

D. The Interview: Questions You Are Likely to Encounter

The following is a list of questions you may typically face in an interview; make sure you have prepared thoughtful answers to these questions:

- Is the law your 2nd, 3rd, 4th (or more) career?
- How long did you work at your previous career?
- Did you come to law school because you were at a dead end in your career?
- Did you come to law school to change the focus of your work?
- Did you come to law school because you were in a troubled industry?
- Did you come to law school to “piggyback” on your last career (i.e. accountant, engineer, etc.)?
- Why did you come to law school?
- Do you expect to make more money, be given more responsibility, autonomy than in your previous position?
- Will you have difficulty in taking direction from someone that is younger than you?

All of these questions create an opportunity for you to present your personal history and demonstrate that you are the ideal candidate. This is your opportunity to impress the employer with your maturity, judgment and eagerness to enter a new field.

E. Job Search Resources of Special Interest to Evening Students

The following resources are particularly useful for evening students. Be sure to utilize them.

- (1) Career Services panels, seminars, and Bar Association programs;
- (3) Current Texas A&M students, faculty & alumni;
- (4) The job bank on Symplicity;
- (5) Career Services counselors, with whom you may make an in-person or telephone appointment;
- (7) The books on job search tips, interviewing, and practice areas available for check-out in the Career Services Library (in the Career Services Office)

F. Cover Letters and Thank You Letters

1. Cover Letters

The cover letter that you submit with your resume establishes your reasons for applying for a particular position and interests the reader in your application. Using business letter format,

always type letters on standard 8 1/2" x 11" bond stationery, signing each letter individually. Every letter should be personalized to most effectively introduce you and what is unique in your background to a prospective employer. Make sure that names are spelled correctly, that addresses are accurate and that your return address is on the letter and envelope.

The content of this initial employer contact should be clear and straightforward. Let the employer know why you are writing, where you learned of the position (if applying to a specific job lead), why you are interested in the firm or organization, how you can be reached, and that you are eager for the opportunity to interview. Although it should be self-evident, there is never any place for an exclamation point in a cover letter.

Convince the reader to review your resume and grant you an interview. If you seek employment in a geographic area at a distance from the Dallas/Fort Worth metropolitan area, indicate your reason for doing so (e.g., plan to practice in that area upon graduation, originally from the area, have family in the area, etc.) Emphasize any ties you may have to the area as well. In other words, if you grew up on the West Coast but attended undergraduate school and have worked in Texas, it is highly likely that there is nothing on your resume that would indicate your West Coast roots. It would be wise in these circumstances to include both your local and permanent addresses as well as an explanation of your intention to practice on the West Coast upon graduation.

Additionally, when writing to an employer at a distance from Texas, such as Washington, D.C., Chicago, Boston, Atlanta, etc., it is a wise idea to include mention that you: 1) plan to be in the area on specific days or 2) emphasize that you would be happy to make arrangements to meet with them at any time that is convenient. The former is an especially effective way to go since an employer may decide that based on the strength of your resume and the fact that you are going to be in the area anyway, it would make sense to set up an appointment to meet with you during your designated time period. Employers rarely pay for the travel arrangements for screening interviews. Thus, if you indicate that you plan on being in the area, it may encourage the employer to invite you in for an appointment.

The Career Services Office has a handout on writing cover letters that is available in the Career Services Office, as well as on the Career Services website. Sample cover letters are provided in the handout as a guideline only. While the format of the letter should follow the standard business letter format, the actual style and content of a cover letter must be spontaneous and clearly your own to be most effective. Students who are writing to public interest employers should note that their cover letters might be longer and more detailed than those written to large or corporate practices. The counselors in the Career Services Office will gladly review your cover letters.

A Word About E-Mail

Be sure to research whether the employer prefers that you submit your cover letter and resume via e-mail or in hard copy. The Career Services Office can help you with this. It is generally not appropriate to initiate contact via e-mail with an employer unless your research shows that they prefer it. That said, e-mail can be a very useful tool for informal or follow-up contacts. For

example, you may want to e-mail Texas A&M alumni/ae at a firm, especially when you have an interview scheduled at the firm where the alum is working, or you may use e-mail to follow-up with contacts you have already made (such as following up with an attorney who gave you her card at a bar association function); it's informal and not as intrusive as a phone call. This is a judgment question, and if you have any doubt, ask one of the counselors in the Career Services Office.

2. Thank You Letters

Students often ask whether or not they should send thank-you letters to employers as follow-ups to their in-office interviews. The answer is yes. Doing so is certainly a thoughtful thing to do and can serve to reaffirm your strong interest in an employer. A poorly written or stilted thank-you letter, however, can sometimes prove more hurtful than helpful to your prospects of securing a position. Many employers, especially smaller firms, appreciate a thank-you letter, viewing it as a courtesy as well as an indication of interest. For large firms with recruiting coordinators, a short thank-you note after a call-back interview to the recruiting coordinator you met (thanking him or her for arranging the interviews and reiterating your interest in the firm) is nice; this note could be e-mailed. It is also nice (and underscores your interest in the firm) to send a thank-you note to the people who interviewed you at the call-back, or to send a thank-you note to the person you felt most connected to, asking her/him to pass along your thanks to the others (name the others). If you forget the names of the people with whom you interviewed, call the recruiting coordinator; an even better course is to ask for the business card of the person at the end of each interview.

The Career Services Office has handouts on writing thank-you letters available in the Career Services Office and on the Career Services website.

3. Resumes

Evening students often have special problems in developing resumes because of their extensive work experience before coming to law school. The Career Services Office has a number of resources devoted to resume writing, including a handout that is available in the office and on the Career Services website. You should make an appointment with a Career Services counselor to review your resume before sending it out to employers.