

## What Does a Lawyer Do Anyway?

### Legal Practice Areas

We've all seen them on TV – but what do lawyers *really* do? Well, as you'll see in a minute – the best way to find that out is to ask them! We also included a very general overview of the most common categories of legal practice *areas* below. (We'll turn to legal practice *settings* in a minute.)

#### ***Litigation***

Litigation attorneys advise their clients about all stages of disputes and potential disputes. From deciding whether or not to sue a competitor, to counseling a defendant about whether to accept a plea bargain, litigation attorneys are the ones who keep the court system moving. Most litigation attorneys spend a great deal of time researching and writing about legal issues at the heart of the disputes they're involved in. Litigation attorneys may also counsel their clients about how to avoid and settle disputes.

#### ***Corporate***

Corporate law is a very broad practice area and is sometimes referred to as transactional law. Firms categorize corporate practices in different ways. For example, some firms might have separate practice groups for corporate finance, real estate or mergers & acquisitions, while other firms include them within a single corporate department. Corporate attorneys advise businesses on their legal obligations, rights and responsibilities in commercial transactions. They advise clients about how to structure a business or evaluate a possible deal. Some of the common responsibilities of a corporate attorney include structuring transactions, drafting and negotiating documents, negotiating term sheets, conducting conference calls and attending meetings in order to negotiate transactions.

#### ***Regulatory***

Regulatory attorneys represent a variety of clients, from Fortune 500 companies to small businesses, regarding issues before federal, state and local government agencies. Regulatory attorneys help clients comply with various existing regulatory requirements imposed by federal, state and local government agencies. In addition, regulatory attorneys evaluate the potential impact of regulatory developments and rulemaking on their clients' interests. In some cases, regulatory attorneys advocate for changes in proposed regulations or other agency actions on behalf of their clients.

#### ***Policy***

Although certainly a well-represented group in Washington, D.C., attorneys throughout the country would describe their practice as “policy-oriented.” Policy attorneys advocate for specific federal and state legislative provisions and research and analyze legal and policy issues to help their clients understand existing legislation and what changes, if any, are desirable. Lobbyists and government affairs attorneys, lawyers who work for Members of Congress, Congressional Committees and state legislatures, all fall under this category; as do lawyers who work for trade associations, “think-tanks” and other research institutes.

## Legal Practice Settings

It may seem like too fine a point, but a huge part of what makes for a rewarding legal career is finding the right practice setting. Learn about some of the most common ones below – all of these settings are available to litigation, corporate, regulatory and policy attorneys!

### ***Law Firm/Private Practice***

Law firms come in all shapes and sizes and do all sorts of work, but they all have one thing in common – they represent clients (companies and individuals) and are for-profit enterprises. 65% of the Class of 2008 worked in this setting following graduation.<sup>3</sup>

### ***Government***

You can find lawyers at all levels of government, working on just about every issue that governments deal with. From the White House to the Alexandria City Council, lawyers are on-hand to help all levels of federal, state and local government (including legislators) execute their mission, which is usually something intended to benefit the public good. Many lawyers also work for government entities in a non-legal capacity. 11% of the Class of 2008 went on to government positions.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Judicial Clerkships***

Clerks work for all levels of federal and state judges throughout the country. Clerks typically review all of the motions and pleadings in a pending case and then perform research to help the judge decide how to rule on the relevant issues. 9% of the Class of 2008 became judicial law clerks.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Business/Companies***

Almost all companies employ lawyers to perform a variety of work to help the company achieve its business goals. Whether in the general counsel's office or working directly with the sales force, in-house attorneys have a direct impact on the conduct of the companies they work for. Many lawyers also work for companies in a non-legal capacity. 6% of the Class of 2008 works in this setting.<sup>6</sup>

### ***Public Interest Organizations***

Public interest organizations provide all types of legal advice to clients – individuals and entities – that could not otherwise afford legal representation. Public interest lawyers work in a variety of capacities throughout the country. For the Class of 2008, 4% of our students joined public interest organizations after graduation.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Taken from 2008 NALP Directory of Law Schools, available at: [http://www.nalplawsonline.org/ndlsdir\\_search\\_results.asp](http://www.nalplawsonline.org/ndlsdir_search_results.asp)

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

<sup>5</sup> *Id.*

<sup>6</sup> *Id.*

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*