

## JOB SEARCH STRATEGIES

### Action Plan for Graduating Students

Are you graduating in a few months and don't have a job yet? Don't panic! This handout defines a comprehensive, multi-faceted approach to job searching for graduating students. As you read, you will see we suggest you do a great deal. Not only do we lay out a full menu of job search activities which we feel are essential, but also we suggest you continue to get legal work experience even if you have to volunteer; that you become involved with a bar association of your choice for networking; that you consider searching in geographical areas that are not your first choice; and that you consider contract and part-time work while continuing to search for a full-time salaried position with benefits. It's a lot to ask of you; however, given the job market and the economy, this broad-reaching approach is the best advice. Please remember three things. First, you are well-trained in the law and will be able to make a successful transition to the practice of law. Second, we at the CDO are committed to helping you in any way we can. Third, we cannot help you if you do not contact us, so stay in touch!

#### **Timeline**

Middle of Semester to Start of Exam Period: Perform the first three elements of the General Approach, *infra*, by deciding what practice areas and sectors interest you; create targeted mailing lists of preferred employers; and find potential employers by using standard resources. This will save you a lot of work when exams are over and will allow you to restart your search earlier. To be sure, how much time you devote to these tasks has to be tailored to the demands of preparation for final exams.

End of Exam Period to One Month Before Bar Examination: Restart your search by following the General Approach, *infra*. Do what you can while studying for the bar exam, giving as much weight to studying for the bar as your individual situation requires. If you can avoid working while studying, we recommend you do so and substitute networking and part-time job searching in its place. Doing so is good time management and gives you a necessary break from the intense immersion of bar review. The time to stop searching or working is the start of the month in which the bar exam is given.

After the Bar Exam: Take a short vacation (1-2 weeks) and restart your search. If there is a preferred approach to follow, it is to do everything simultaneously. That is, investigate all law practice substantive areas and practice segments (private practice, government, public interest, in-house corporate, etc.) of interest at the same time, and use all search techniques at the same time. A seriatim approach based on pure prioritizing of interests and techniques runs a significant risk of not working because by the time one substantive area or practice segment is exhausted, and one technique is used up, what opportunities were available in other areas and segments, and by other techniques, may no longer be available.

## **General Approach**

1. Decide what practice areas and sectors of the practice interest you. Pay close attention to the courses you took and the work experience you had. They, at least partially, will tend to define where you will be more marketable. Remember to revise your resume to emphasize your relevant practice area experience for each application.
2. Create targeted employer search lists by practice areas and sectors, and where you feel you will be most competitive. This is time consuming, but it is imperative. Be candid when assessing where you are most competitive, but do not underestimate yourself either.
3. Use standard resources, Internet and print, to find employers. A preferred list of Internet resources is set forth below, and other print and Internet resources are discussed in the text of various sections.
4. Check Internet career resource websites regularly (at least once a week) for job announcements.
5. Read the classified ads in relevant legal newspaper(s) every week. Copies of DC Metro area papers are available in the CDO Resource Library; others are online. Graduates have found full-time jobs in tough markets by answering these ads.
6. Write employers directly, especially close to the time your bar results are expected and, certainly, after you pass the bar. A surge in hiring usually occurs when bar results are known, especially by small and mid-sized firms. Feel free to start earlier if you have a lot to contact and then follow up when the results are public.
7. Consider geographical locations other than your most favored, especially if you have contacts there; your hometown can help you get started. An excellent way to get a handle on the market in another location is to contact graduates of GW Law and your undergraduate institution on an informational basis (not as job interviews). The CDO can put you in touch with members of our Alumni Career Advisor Network who have agreed to speak with students and alumni about their practice areas. You can also use [www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com) and Leadership Directories (accessible through the Portal) to find alumni.
8. Even though finding a job is almost a job in itself, try to make some time to find some part-time work, paid or volunteer. Doing so allows you to continue to develop your professional skills and, perhaps more importantly, shows potential employers that you consider yourself a member of the profession and you are committed to the practice. It also shows initiative by refusing to remain professionally inactive.
9. Become active in the substantive law section(s) of interest to you in state, county, or municipal bar associations. This is an excellent way to network, especially if you offer to help with CLE programming.
10. If an employer cannot or will not offer full-time employment with the usual benefits, consider working on a contract basis and obtaining health insurance through a state, county, or local bar association, the ABA, or your undergraduate institution. Newspaper reports indicate such institutions are now marketing such insurance to their alumni at competitive rates. The idea is do reasonable legal work while continuing to look for salaried work. The same rationale applies to part-time work. An old saying is that it is always easier to find a job when you already have a job.
11. If you are not able to secure paying legal work sufficient to allow you to meet living expenses and start paying student loans, consider petitioning your lenders to allow you to

forbear starting repayment until you can secure such work. The maximum forbearance period is usually two years, during which time accrued interest is added to principal (capitalized). It may also be possible for you to pay just the interest during the forbearance period. You may need a letter from the CDO to the lender certifying that you are unemployed and you are actively seeking employment. We will provide that letter. If you find yourself with volunteer legal work only, a time-honored solution is a part-time non-legal job to defray ordinary living expenses.

## **Specific Strategies by Practice Sectors**

### **Direct Contacting of Private Firms**

1. An easy way to build a targeted employer list in the private practice segment is to use [www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com) and [www.lawyers.com](http://www.lawyers.com). The former tends to emphasize mid-sized to large law firms, while the latter emphasizes sole practitioners and small to mid-sized firms. These sites are free and registration is not required. Martindale.com can also be accessed through [www.lexis.com](http://www.lexis.com); contact the CDO for the Lexis ID number. On the sign-in page, enter the Lexis ID number and leave the password section blank. There are other resources on Lexis, including Judicial and Government resources, accessed by clicking on “Reference”, and then “Career Development”. Westlaw has a Careers tab also, with links to advice on managing your career: [www.lawchool.westlaw.com](http://www.lawchool.westlaw.com). If you access your Westlaw password before graduation, it remains active for one year following graduation, allowing you access to certain career-related databases and Attorney Jobs Online (through the Careers tab). After a year following graduation, the only way you can gain access to the website is to visit the CDO in person and ask the staff to log onto the site using our staff password.
2. Use martindale.com’s Lawyer Locator to find law firms and lawyers by areas of practice and geographical location (city, county, state, country). Click on the Location/Area of Practice tab, enter the relevant information, and click on “Search”. If you are searching for GW Law alumni for informational interviewing, click “Advanced” and select “Lawyers”, then type “George Washington University” in the Law School window. If the substantive practice area is not contained in the scroll down list, highlight “All Areas” and type the area in the window immediately to the right. When searching for firms practicing particular kinds of law, scroll through the partner biographical section on the firm’s martindale.com website to find the partner(s) who practice in your area(s) of interest. This will give you some idea of the proportion of the firm’s total practice represented by this area. If you decide the firm is one to which you wish to apply, do not write the GW grad or any other partner in the same practice area. Instead, write to either the hiring partner, by name (you may have to call the firm to learn her or his name), or the recruiting director. If the firm’s martindale.com website has a link to its commercial website, or the address of that site, you can usually find the name or contact information there; look for links labeled “jobs”, “career”, “recruiting”. Or search Google using the firm’s name. Smaller firms may not have any formal recruiting staff, so call to find out to whom to write; it could be a senior partner or her/his assistant. No matter to whom you address the letter, draft it as if you were writing to the ultimate decision-maker. The risk of writing directly to a partner in your practice area is that the recruiting staff may be miffed that you avoided them, and a GW alum may feel you are trying to use the fact that you both went to the same law school to gain an unwarranted advantage and not respond to

you. When answering an announcement, always send your credentials to the person specified therein, but, again, draft your correspondence as if you are writing the ultimate decision-maker.

3. Lawyers.com is similar to martindale.com with its Find A Lawyer Quick Search; the scroll down practice area list is in two parts, one for “personal users” and one for “business users”.
4. An excellent resource for DC Metro area law firms is the Legal Times Directory of Metro DC Law Offices which may be viewed in the CDO Resource Library.
5. For finding public interest-oriented private law firms, use Harvard’s Private Public Interest and Plaintiff’s Firm Guide.

### Direct Contacting of Government Agencies

1. Use Leadership Directories to find information about government agencies and GW alumni in the government. This resource is available through a link on the Portal, under “Law School Resources.” This database provides extremely detailed information about government personnel, including direct dial phone numbers and email addresses.
2. Another excellent Internet resource is the NALP Legal Employment Opportunities Guide, [www.pslawnet.org/uploads/2008-2009\\_FLEOG\\_FINAL\\_PDF.pdf](http://www.pslawnet.org/uploads/2008-2009_FLEOG_FINAL_PDF.pdf). It has a resource bibliography, discussion of federal employment generally, application guidance (glossary of terms; description of forms; salary and benefits information; tips on landing a job), plenty of Internet addresses for agencies and their internal divisions and discussion of their missions, and individual agencies’/divisions’ hiring projects and contact information.
3. With the exception of the Department of Justice (DOJ), you should learn the name of the General Counsel of the agency (or other title describing the chief legal officer). Generally, you will send your credentials directly to that person. You should specify the division(s) in which you are interested. Because government positions at this level do turn over, especially when there is a change of administration, you might wish to call the General Counsel’s office to confirm the name of the General Counsel before writing. Virtually all DOJ entry-level hiring is done through the Attorney General Honors Program; see [www.usdoj.gov/oarm/arm/hp/hp.htm](http://www.usdoj.gov/oarm/arm/hp/hp.htm). DOJ lateral hiring is decentralized among the various divisions; so either write to the Assistant Attorney General for the division(s) in which you are interested, or to any individual or position specified on the division’s web page. Lateral positions are usually posted at [www.usdoj.gov/oarm](http://www.usdoj.gov/oarm). If other agencies’ legal department/office of general counsel webpages or the NALP Federal Legal Employment Guide specify a designated individual or position to whom to send your credentials, follow those instructions.
4. When answering a federal government job announcement, always write to the named contact person. This person is usually in the agency’s human resource department that is collecting resumes for the Office of General Counsel or other legal entity in the agency. These announcements can sometimes be found on the agency’s website and more frequently on that of the Office of Personnel Management, [www.usajobs.opm.gov](http://www.usajobs.opm.gov). USAJOBS has a feature by which you can have new announcements sent to you weekly. All such announcements usually specify that you submit a supplemental document that demonstrates you possess the “Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities” (KSAs) required by the position. There is a certain skill in preparing this document (It is not a re-write of your resume.) and you should consult the CDO’s detailed resources on this topic.

5. Many other federal agencies hire through Honors Programs which have pre-set qualifications for applicants and may (as DOJ does) make distinctions between recent graduates and experienced lawyers. For information about all Honors Programs, consult the Government Honors & Internship Handbook at [www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm](http://www.law.arizona.edu/career/honorshandbook.cfm). Contact the CDO to get the current username and password. Caveat: The Handbook focuses on students, graduating 3Ls/4Ls, LLMs (who are eligible for Honors Programs only if they are US citizens and entered their LLM program directly after receiving their JD), and current judicial law clerks. Even if the deadline has passed, do not hesitate to write directly to the general counsel. Unexpected departures and workload increases do occur.
6. Resources for state and municipal government agencies are found in Leadership Directories. Follow the same procedure for federal agencies when applying to state and municipal agencies. Most, if not all, State and Municipal governments have webpages. If you cannot find them in any print resource, use the Google search engine to search for “[Name of State] State Government”. There may be links to municipal and county websites. A good state/county/city website to search for lawyers in state and municipal governments is [www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm](http://www.statelocalgov.net/index.cfm). A good site for state and local prosecutors is [www.prosecutor.info](http://www.prosecutor.info).

#### Direct Contacting of Public Interest Entities

1. The major print resource is Harvard Law School’s “Serving the Public: A Job Search Guide”, which is available in the CDO Resource Library. It has a good overview with descriptions of specific practice areas. When writing directly to apply for a position with a public interest organization, write to the head of its legal department or to the head of the entity if it is a completely legal entity, such as a public defender service. Follow up as you would with a private law firm or government agency. When answering an announcement, always write to the designated contact person.
2. An excellent, indeed critical, on-line resource for public service (broadly defined) opportunities is the Public Service Law Network Worldwide, a/k/a PSLawNet, [www.pslawnet.org](http://www.pslawnet.org). This database assists law students and graduates to locate public service opportunities with public interest organizations, government agencies, judges, and private firms with public interest or significant pro bono practices. Because GW subscribes to this service, it is free for GW students and alumni. To access PSLawNet, you need to spend a few minutes registering your profile so that you can receive a password and member ID. As noted in the instructions, it is even possible to request e-mail notification when certain types of positions become available
3. The National Legal Aid and Public Defender Association website ([www.nlada.org](http://www.nlada.org)) contains national job listings for public defender and legal aid offices. Equal Justice Works ([www.equaljusticeworks.org](http://www.equaljusticeworks.org)) has information regarding post-graduate fellowships and more general information regarding loan forgiveness programs, other career websites, etc.

#### Direct Contacting of In-House Corporate Legal Departments

1. The major print resources are the Directory of Corporate Counsel and the Martindale-Hubbell Corporate Law Directory, both of which are in the CDO Resource Library. Only Martindale-Hubbell is online as the “Corporate” tab on [martindale.com](http://martindale.com)’s Lawyer Locator.

You have to know the name of the corporation and its geographical location. But, if you want to know the names of the corporations which have told martindale.com they have in-house legal departments in a given city or state, just type in the name of the city and highlight the state, or just highlight the state; cities will be presented in alphabetical order. Click on the corporate name to see the department listing. These two print resources have biographical information on individual members of each department listed. As when writing the General Counsel of a government agency, write to the head of the legal department who is usually the first person listed and, many times, has the title of Vice President and General Counsel. When answering a specific job announcement, always write to the designated contact person.

2. While most corporate legal departments hire experienced attorneys, usually those with 6-8 years experience (and usually not more than 10), there are exceptions and you can only find out by contacting them directly. For example, some interviewed during FRP.

### **CDO Online Job Search Resources**

The CDO has compiled links to online job search resources including job banks, search engines, and directories; government, judicial clerkship, and public interest-related links; and links to state bar and other professional groups' information.

[www.law.gwu.edu/Careers/onlineresources/Pages/LegalJobSearchLinks.aspx](http://www.law.gwu.edu/Careers/onlineresources/Pages/LegalJobSearchLinks.aspx)

Please note: This is not a comprehensive list of all the legal resources available online. The list is periodically updated; if you encounter a non-working link, please email the CDO at [cdo@law.gwu.edu](mailto:cdo@law.gwu.edu).