THE 1L SUMMER JOB SEARCH – LARGE FIRM

Overview

The vast majority of large law firms across the country have summer associate programs whereby they hire current law students to work with them for the summer. The summer associate program is usually the primary means through which these firms hire entry-level associates. They use their summer associate program to evaluate the students’ work product, professional judgment, and interaction with attorneys, clients and staff. Generally, the firm is trying to determine whether the student possesses the skills, qualities and attributes that would make the student a successful associate at the firm following graduation from law school. Summer associate programs have been referred to as the “summer long job interview.”

Given the economic realities this is becoming more rare, however, some, but not all, large law firms with a summer associate program hire 1Ls as summer associates. If you are hired as a 1L summer associate, your goal is to receive an offer from that firm to return for a second summer. In addition to an offer to return as a 2L, a few firms may make an offer of permanent employment following law school.

Benefits of Working for a Large Firm

The benefits of working at a large firm are numerous. Most students appreciate the compensation package offered by large firms. In addition, you are able to gain experience in a variety of practice areas, as most firms either allow their summer associates to rotate through various departments or to take a variety of assignments from various practice areas. Also, many students appreciate the prestige of having a large firm name on their resume.

There are many social benefits as well. Most of the firms organize several social events where the attorneys and summer associates can get to know each other. These social events vary by firm, but can include tickets to sporting events or concerts, dinners and lunches out, public service outings, and dinners hosted by attorneys in their homes. At the end of their summer, many summer associates feel bonded to both the firm and the other summer associates.

Types of Activities You May Be Engaged In

The majority of your working hours will likely be spent performing legal research and writing for the attorneys of the firm. In addition, you may be called upon to draft pleadings or corporate/transactional documents for the attorneys. Large firms put a great deal of effort into ensuring that summer associates see “what attorneys do” and, as such, summer associates often accompany attorneys to court, depositions, transactional closings and client meetings. Most firms emphasize that the work you are doing as a summer associate is the same type of work performed by first-year associates at the firm.

When to Apply

Washington University Law and most large firms are members of the National Association of Law Placement (NALP). Pursuant to the NALP guidelines, first-year law students cannot contact NALP employer members until on or after December 1. Please do not send your resume and cover letter prior to December 1, as some member employers may not review them. For most of the NALP member firms,
you want to make sure your materials arrive within a short time following December 1. Some employers may have other application timelines as specified on their NALP form in the *NALP Directory of Legal Employers* (see Step 4 below).

**Application Process**

**Step 1:** **Self Assessment** - Begin thinking about the type of firms you want to target for your 1L summer job search. Does the employer have to have a particular practice area, such as intellectual property or employment law, for you to consider them? What geographic areas do you want to target? In what geographic areas do you have the greatest likelihood of success? Keep in mind that especially for 1Ls, large firms want to see a strong geographic tie to the area in which you are applying.

**Step 2:** **Develop Your Resume and Cover Letter** – Begin working on your resume and cover letter that you plan to send to the firms in which you are interested. If you have not attended a resume and cover letter workshop, please stop by the CSO to obtain a copy of the Marketing Yourself to Legal Employers packet. Remember that legal employers expect your resume to be in a certain format, so please try to conform to the templates and examples in the packet. Do not, however, copy any language directly from the examples.

**Step 3:** **Visit the CSO** – On or after November 1, please feel free to schedule an appointment with your assigned CSO advisor if you have any questions. CSO advisors want to work with you to develop a job search strategy for both this summer and beyond and provide tips on how you can most effectively market yourself to employers in your cover letter and on your resume.

**Step 4:** **Research Law Firms** – Once you have narrowed your focus, you can start researching law firms to see what firms meet the criteria you have established. The primary research resources for large private employers are:

*NALP Directory of Legal Employers* – Available in hard copy in the CSO or online at [www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com). The NALP Directory is the fastest and easiest way to research the large firms that are members of NALP. The hard copy version is organized geographically. Using the online version, you can search for firms using various criteria, such as geographic location, practice areas, whether they hire 1Ls, etc. The online version may provide more detailed information about the firm than the hard copy. To search for firms that hire 1Ls, use the Advanced Search and click on 1Ls in the “Organizations that hire” drop down menu. “CBC” means that 1Ls are hired on a case-by-case basis. The NALP Form will indicate when the employer expects 1Ls to apply, *i.e.*, as soon as possible after December 1, by January 31, etc. Address your cover letter to the Recruiting Contact listed on the NALP form, not the hiring partner. In mid- to late-November, you will receive information about how to use the NALP Mail Merge feature.

*Martindale-Hubbell® Law Directory* - Available in hard copy in the Law Library or online at [www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com). Martindale-Hubbell includes firms of all sizes, not just large law firms. Some large firms *may* be in Martindale that are not members of NALP.
The hard copy is organized geographically. Using the online version, you can search for firms using various criteria, such as geographic location, practice areas, firm size, etc. Martindale will only give you a description of the firm, biographies of its attorneys and representative clients. It will not give you the name of the recruiting contact to which you should address your cover letter. Make a quick call to the firm or visit the firm’s website to see to whom your cover letter should be addressed.

Local Business Journals – The CSO has copies of the Book of Lists published by business journals in many cities across the country (including Boston, Chicago, D.C., Los Angeles, New York, Philadelphia, San Francisco and St. Louis). The Book of Lists includes a list of the largest law firms in the metropolitan area. You will need to use the NALP Directory or Martindale to find additional information about these firms, including contact information.

Step 5: Apply for 1L Positions – After December 1 and after you have performed your employer research, you can start sending your materials to the firms. All you need to send is a cover letter and resume. If you have a list of references ready, you might want to include it, but it is not necessary at this point. Obviously, you will not yet have a law school transcript as of December 1. For most large firms, you want to apply close to that December 1 date, but check the NALP Directory for employer specifics. They will receive applications from law students across the country, and you want your materials to be in the mix for early consideration.

Step 6: Follow Up – About 10 business days after you send your materials, you should follow up with the firms to see if an interview is appropriate – especially if you plan to be in the area over Winter Break.

Step 7: Networking – As you go through the above steps, do not forget to use to your advantage the contacts that you may already have in a legal community. Many students find summer positions by letting people know what they are looking for. Talk to as many people as you can. Even if they are not lawyers, they probably know lawyers and may be able to put you into contact with attorneys willing to help you out. If an employer that you are interested in hosts a winter break reception for 1Ls, be sure to attend (check the Law Daily for reception invitations).

Helpful Tip: Do not forget to check the job postings that can be found in Symplicity. The employers listed in the Symplicity job postings have specifically contacted Washington University Law and indicated that they will be hiring summer clerks or summer associates. You will receive your Symplicity password around December 1.