THE 1L SUMMER JOB SEARCH – MID-SIZED OR SMALL FIRMS

Overview

The majority of attorneys working in the United States practice at firms of 10 attorneys or smaller. The definition of what is a mid-sized or small firm varies by geographic location but can be anywhere from 100+ attorneys to 2 attorneys. Some of these firms may be boutiques (meaning they practice in only one discreet area of the law, such as family law, litigation or intellectual property) while others may be general practice firms that have lawyers practicing in a variety of areas.

Many mid-sized or small law firms hire 1Ls as summer law clerks or summer law interns. Some of these firms may ask you to return for a second summer as a law clerk. For smaller firms, hiring is very much contingent upon whether the firm has enough client work to justify hiring a summer intern.

Benefits of Working for a Mid-Sized or Small Firm

Most students appreciate the “hands on experience” that they get at a mid-sized or small firm. All the work you do is necessary to the client and their case or business deal – there is no “busy work.” In addition, exposure to various practice areas early on in your legal career can help solidify your practice area interests and rule others out.

You generally work very closely with the attorneys and get to know them and the rest of the staff very well. The mentor/mentee relationship formed with the attorneys can be very beneficial to your career, especially if you plan to practice in that geographic area following graduation. Even if the firm is not looking to expand, those relationships can help you make inroads in the legal community and may open doors at other employers. Additionally, working at a mid-sized or small firm may allow you the time to do some informational interviewing with other attorneys in the geographic area to assist you in forming your professional network early on in your career.

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. You may also accompany attorneys to court, depositions, transactional closings and/or client meetings.

Often times, the type of experience you obtain at a smaller firm is directly proportional to the effort you put in. If you want to go to court, ask the attorney for whom you drafted a pleading. If you want to see a closing, ask the attorney for whom you drafted a sales agreement if you can tag along to the closing. If you did some research for a particular client, ask if you could sit in on the next meeting with that client.

When to Apply

Many mid-sized or small firms do not hire summer law clerks until the spring semester. For the most part, your mid-sized or small firm job search can wait until winter break or early in the spring semester. However, if you have a connection to an attorney working in that type of firm, you might want to send
your resume and cover letter to him or her prior to winter break, especially if you plan to be in the area during that time period and would be available to interview.

Each individual firm may have a slightly different hiring timeline and some may not even think about hiring someone until later in the spring semester. Patience and following up with the employers to whom you apply can pay dividends in the process of landing a small firm clerkship.

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 family law or employment law, for you to consider them? Would you like to work for a firm that primarily does plaintiff’s work or defense work? What geographic areas do you want to target? In what geographic areas do you have the greatest likelihood of success? Do you have any connections to the legal community in a particular geographic area? Does anyone in your family or circle of friends have those connections?

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 private employers are:

Martindale-Hubbell® Law Directory - Available in hard copy in the Law Library or online at www.martindale.com. Martindale-Hubbell includes firms of all sizes - if a firm has more than 10 attorneys, it will likely be listed in Martindale. Many much smaller firms are also listed. 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 hiring partner 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.

Helpful Tip: When using the online “Advanced Search”, if you type in a city and select a state, the “expand search by” drop down menu will become available. This allows you to expand your search by a certain number of miles and can be very useful to obtain results in suburban areas, such as Southern California.
**NALP Directory of Legal Employers** – Available in hard copy in the CSO or online at www.nalpdirectory.com. Although the NALP Directory primarily consists of larger firms, *some* mid-sized firms *may* be listed. 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 determine whether a firm hires 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.

**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. However, for some cities, such as St. Louis, the “largest” law firms get fairly small as you go down the list. You will need to use the NALP Directory or Martindale to find additional information about these firms, including contact information.

**Step 5:** **Apply for Summer Law Clerk/Summer Intern 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 have a law school transcript until spring semester. You may wish to include a transcript in any mailings you send out after grades become available, but it is not necessary.

**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. With smaller employers follow up is crucial. Usually, these firms do not have a staff person whose duties include reviewing resumes of potential law clerks. Instead, the hiring attorney fulfills that function. That attorney usually has a full case load that receives his or her primary attention. If you take the initiative to follow up, that could mean the difference between obtaining an interview and waiting a very long time for a response.

**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.

**Helpful Tip:** Throughout this process, do not forget to regularly 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 law clerks. We receive job postings from firms throughout the spring semester, so check regularly. You will receive your Symplicity password around December 1.