

Introduction to Career Development



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WELCOME

Welcome to the Career Development Office (CDO). We look forward to working with you during your three years at Yale Law School as you develop and explore your career interests. Our name, the *Career Development Office*, is illustrative of the nature of our work with students—we are here to assist you in developing and executing a career plan, not to *place* you with a particular employer. We will support your career journey through one-on-one career counseling, connecting you with mentors, developing and sharing career resources, and coordinating career and interview programs.

In the fall, every first-year student will be assigned to one of our four attorney counselors and CDO will commence our first-year career development programming.

Expectation Setting

CDO is committed to ensuring that all students receive fair treatment from employers who use our career services, and that the law school, its students, and employers act in good faith in the recruiting and hiring process. Please review Yale Law School's Recruiting Policies, Yale's Sexual Misconduct Policies, and NALP's Principles for a Fair and Ethical Recruitment Process to understand the rights and responsibilities of students and employers during the recruiting process.

As you commence this phase of your professional career, we think it is important to lay out some expectations for our working relationship.

We expect you to take ownership of your job search. To do this, you will need to:

- read our student communication and proactively seek out information you need from our office;
- meet with your assigned CDO counselor, and as your career goals progress, meet with the counselor best-suited to your interests;
- attend CDO programs relating to your goals and interests, particularly our first-year application materials and interviewing sessions;
- present your background and credentials accurately in all written and verbal communication;
- build and engage your network using tools we provide;
- be responsive to outreach from the office, including responding to requests for updates on your job search and RSVPing to events when needed;
- honor commitments you have made, including showing up on time for meetings, honoring commitments to employers; and attending events for which you RSVP;
- review and comply with Yale Law School's Recruiting Policies and NALP's Principles for a Fair and Ethical Recruitment Process.

In return, you can expect us to:

- guide you in developing an effective career plan;
- identify resources to support your career plan;
- respond to your emails or calls promptly (within two business days);
- be on time and prepared for our meetings;
- offer timely programming and information to support your job search;
- provide you with meaningful feedback on your résumé and cover letters, and useful advice on other application materials;
- guide you through the application and interview process;
- connect you to students, faculty, and alumni whom we believe may be useful to your career exploration;
- ensure that employers with whom you interact through CDO comport themselves with professionalism and in compliance with Yale Law School's Recruiting Policies, including the Law School's nondiscrimination policy; and NALP's Principles for a Fair and Ethical Recruitment Process.

CHAPTER 1

CAREER SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

A. Individual Counseling

CDO has four attorney counselors who are available to discuss your career goals and aspirations; connect you to fellow students, alumni, and others who may be useful to your job search; direct you to relevant resources; provide application and interview advice; and discuss any issues you face during the job search process. Given the small student body, CDO counselors are able to meet individually with every student. Counseling is available to you not only as a student, but also as a graduate of the Law School.

As a first-year student, you will be assigned a CDO counselor who will help you navigate the first summer job search. After that time, you are welcome to meet with a counselor of your choosing. Counseling appointments can through your counselor's Calendly link or by calling CDO (203-432-1676).

In addition to CDO's attorney counselors, CDO coordinates many opportunities for students to obtain individual advice from alumni who serve as Mentors-in-Residence.

B. CDO Website Resources

CDO's website provides information about career pathways, a toolkit for student job seekers, and much more. CDO has career guides on a wide range of legal career topics including public interest, government, law teaching, business careers, and judicial clerkships. To access the "CDO version" of an online resource (which contains information only for YLS students and alumni), use your Yale credentials.

C. Educational Programs

CDO hosts many programs each year including skills workshops, practice area discussions, and professional development advice. CDO offers a series of programs specifically for first-year students commencing in the fall which introduces students to legal careers and provides a step-by-step guide to the summer job search process. Below is our first-year student fall curriculum.

- The 1L Summer Job Search Overview
- Intro to Public Interest Careers
- Public Interest Career Fair
- Financing your Summer Public Interest Job
- Intro to Business and Alternative Careers
- Intro to Judicial Clerkships
- Law Firm Practice: Litigation, Corporate or Something Else?
- Working for a Public Interest Law Firm
- The 1L Job Search: Upper-class Students' Perspectives
- Application Preparation
- Interviewing Tips for 1Ls
- Mock Interview Program

Information about CDO programs is made available in numerous ways. Programs are listed on the [YLS online events calendar](#); they are announced in the CDO Weekly E-News that is sent to all students; they are listed under Events on the [Career Management System](#) (if you are unsure of your login, use the ‘forgot password’ link or contact CDO), and they are described on posters that line the hallways of the Law School in the week leading up to the event. A number of CDO programs are also recorded and available [online](#) in a password-protected section available only to the YLS community.

D. Recruiting Events

Yale Law School sponsors several recruiting events during the school year. CDO hosts a large interview program each fall (known as the Fall Interview Program “FIP” or the Virtual Interview Program “VIP”) through which second-year students interview and secure 2L summer internships. Also in the fall, CDO hosts a virtual Public Interest Interview Program (“PIIP”) for second and third-year students to connect with public interest employers. In the spring, typically 15-20 employers visit New Haven to interview first-year students for summer positions at the Spring Interview Program (or “SIP”). In addition, YLS cosponsors the Overseas-Trained LLM Student Interview Program held every January in New York and the Public Interest Legal Career Fair in New York City in February. The Law School also participates as a member- school in the annual Equal Justice Works Conference and Career Fair in Washington, DC in October.

See the [Interview Programs](#) section online for details including which fairs have student travel and registration fees subsidized by CDO.

E. Employment Evaluations

CDO maintains two online systems through which students can learn about the employment experiences of their fellow students and recent graduates. One database contains student summer employment evaluations and the other contains comments from judicial clerks. These evaluations are available through CDO’s [Career Management System \(CMS\)](#). The summer employment evaluations are available for students starting their first year, while the confidential judicial clerkship comment surveys are available for students starting later in the spring semester of their first year. Evaluations are password-protected and available only to members of the YLS community. Every evaluation reflects only the views of the evaluation’s author. To keep the information current, evaluations remain posted for seven years.

F. CDO Online Job Posting System

Through the CDO Job Posting System, employers have the ability to announce job opportunities on the CDO website that are accessible only to YLS students and alumni. Although CDO does not recommend conducting a job search by relying solely on job announcements (because many employers simply don’t take the time to announce openings), our online job listings can be a useful addition to a job search. The system includes an email feature through which students can indicate the types of positions of interest to them and receive email notification of job listings that match their criteria. The Career Management System (CMS) also houses CDO’s [Job Posting System](#).

G. Job Search Timeline

CDO provides detailed job search timelines in the [Toolkit for Student Job Seekers](#). Consult these timelines to be sure you are on track in your career exploration efforts.

CHAPTER 2

CAREERS IN LAW

Deciding to attend law school was a big decision, but it was only one decision of many that you will make in the coming years. The information contained in this guide should serve as a starting point in your exploration into the enormous variety of paths available to you both within and outside the legal profession. As you read this information, keep in mind that whether you are trying to decide where to work for the summer, for your first job upon graduation, or 10 years from now, most lawyers change jobs and employment settings many times during the course of their careers. We encourage you to use your time in law school to explore a variety of employment settings and to think of each opportunity as a stepping stone in your life as a lawyer.

A. Employment Settings for Lawyers

Lawyers are engaged in work of all kinds: starting a small town solo practice, working in 2,000-person law firms, advising Fortune 500 companies and small start-ups, running nonprofit organizations, serving in all branches of government, and every other occupation.

The following are descriptions of the most popular employment settings for Yale Law graduates. Detailed information about these settings is contained in CDO's other [guides](#) including *Law Firm Practice*, *Public Interest Careers*, *Environmental Law*, *Criminal Prosecution*, *Criminal Defense*, *International Public Interest Law*, *Working on Capitol Hill*, and *Lawyers in Business*. Alumni and student profiles are available online [here](#).

1. Law Firms

Despite having significant differences, law firms also share numerous characteristics. They are for-profit associations of lawyers in the business of servicing the needs of their clients. They are typically organized as partnerships, with the partners receiving a share of the profits at the end of each fiscal year, and the associates receiving a salary. Most law firms utilize a pyramid structure, with a base of junior level associates, fewer senior associates, and a small number of partners at the top of the pyramid.

When referring to law firms, people often categorize them by size. Keep in mind though that the description of a law firm as large, mid-size, or small is directly tied to its location. In New York City for example, many law firms have more than 600 attorneys in the NYC office alone, and sometimes more than 2,000 attorneys in all offices combined. In Indianapolis, IN, on the other hand, the largest firms in the city have around 200 lawyers.

Large firms tend to represent large corporations, many of which have an international presence. Mid-size firms typically represent regional clients, including corporations and individuals. Small firm practitioners sometimes maintain a general practice, handling a broad array of matters for small businesses and individuals, and other times, focus on a particular area of practice. Firms that are especially known for concentrating on one area of practice, such as intellectual property or litigation, are called boutique firms.

Some YLS students express interest in practicing international law in a law firm setting. This may mean working for a U.S. law firm in their U.S. or foreign office, an international law firm either in the U.S. or abroad, or a foreign law firm.

Some firms are known for their public interest work. The primary mission of a public interest firm is to assist underrepresented people or causes. Because their typical areas of practice—plaintiffs’ employment discrimination, civil rights, criminal defense, environmental law, and disability rights—are often not profitable, they typically take on other types of matters to pay the bills.

For detailed information about law firm practice, consult the [Law Firms section](#) of the CDO website.

2. Government

There are legal opportunities in government on the federal, state, and local level. The federal government employs attorneys in the Department of Justice, executive branch agencies (such as the Environmental Protection Agency), and in the legislature. Similar to the federal government, states hire attorneys to work in their attorney general’s offices, agencies, and legislatures. On the local level, there are District Attorney’s offices, also known as State Attorney’s offices or County Attorney’s offices. There may also be municipal legal departments, such as the New York City Law Department, with city attorneys who represent the city in litigation and provide legal advice to city leaders. In addition, attorneys may work for various city agencies. For additional information on government careers, visit the [Public Interest](#) section of the CDO website and consult the following [CDO guides](#): *Public Interest Careers*, *Criminal Prosecution*, and *Working on Capitol Hill*.

3. Public Interest Organizations

Attorneys can work in many different public interest environments on a broad range of substantive issues including AIDS, arts, children’s rights, civil rights/civil liberties, consumer, death penalty/prisoner’s rights, disability, economic development, education, elderly, employment/union side labor, environmental, family, First Amendment, gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender rights, health, homelessness/ housing, human rights, immigrants/refugees, international human rights, migrant/farmworker, multicultural rights, Native American, poverty, and women’s rights. Different types of public interest organizations address these areas in a variety of ways. There are impact litigation groups that are devoted to achieving widespread legal and social change, legal services organizations that provide direct assistance to clients, public defenders that provide criminal defense to individuals who cannot afford counsel, policy centers, community development groups, and international public interest organizations.

For additional information on public interest careers, visit the [Public Interest](#) section of the CDO website and consult [CDO’s guides](#), *Public Interest Careers*, *Criminal Defense*, *Criminal Prosecution*, *Environmental Law*, and *International Public Interest Law*.

Although some public interest organizations have opportunities for entry-level attorneys, many others rely on public interest fellowships as the primary avenue for attracting new attorneys. Visit the [YLS Public Interest Fellowships](#) section of the CDO website to learn more about YLS fellowship offerings

4. Academia

It is extremely unusual for a student to become a law professor immediately after graduating from law school. More typically, law professors come from the ranks of attorneys who have practiced for a brief period, from PhD programs or from academic fellowships, have maintained a strong interest in law teaching, and have built the best foundation possible for making such a move by publishing and networking with academics. Some undergraduate institutions hire law

graduates to teach courses such as legal history, or interdisciplinary courses that combine law with another field. Most of these positions require a PhD in addition to a JD. For more information about how the Law School furthers the academic career interests of its students, visit the [Law Teaching section](#) of the CDO website and the Law School's [Law Teaching Program](#) site.

Universities also employ law school graduates in a variety of administrative posts, within the law school and in the university at large. Law graduates commonly hold law school positions such as assistant deans or directors of admissions, student services, and career services. Administrative positions in law schools are often not regarded as faculty positions, unless the individual is also hired for a teaching post.

All universities employ attorneys to represent the university in a wide range of matters including contracts, labor relations, tax issues related to charitable contributions, and real estate. As with all in-house positions, university counsels' offices tend to hire experienced attorneys. At the same time, some welcome summer clerks and/or offer short-term fellowships to recent law graduates.

Another option in academia is serving as a law librarian. Law librarians also administer law libraries serving courts, law firms, corporate legal departments, government agencies, and local and regional bar associations. Law librarians generally have a master's in library science in addition to a JD.

5. Judicial Clerkships

Over 40% of Yale Law School graduates clerk for a judge at some point after graduation. Judicial clerkships are available in federal and state courts, at the trial and appellate levels, and in specialized settings such as bankruptcy, tax, and family courts, and administrative tribunals. Clerkships are attractive to law students for several reasons, including the enormous opportunity they provide to learn firsthand about litigation and procedure, to develop a mentoring relationship with a distinguished jurist, and to be part of the judicial decision-making process. A clerkship is often a highly valued experience and a recognized credential for many future legal endeavors.

Students contemplating clerking after graduation should visit the [Judicial Clerkships](#) section of the CDO website and consult [CDO's guides](#) *Judicial Clerkships in the U.S.*, *U.S. Supreme Court Clerkships*, and *Opportunities with International Tribunals and Foreign Courts*.

6. In-House Practice

The fundamental difference between practicing in the legal department of a corporation and a law firm is that in-house counsel serves only one client—the corporation. To be successful and effective in providing legal advice, in-house lawyers must understand and address the business concerns of the corporation.

Corporations typically hire experienced attorneys, rather than recruiting law school graduates, in part because corporations have fewer attorneys than their outside counsel and expect their attorneys to assume significant responsibility without the need for extensive training. Frequently, corporations hire an associate who has worked on their matters in a law firm. They have had the opportunity to evaluate the associate's work, the associate already has significant knowledge of the company and its business, and the law firm strengthens its relationship with the corporation.

Students interested in in-house practice should visit the [Business](#) section of the CDO website.

7. Non-legal Business Opportunities

Of course, not all law school graduates work in legal settings. Although Yale Law graduates can be found in myriad non-legal work environments, two common choices are management consulting and finance. Management consultants are hired as advisors to corporations to address business problems in a variety of areas such as human resources, product development, health care, and information technology. Large consulting firms offer services in many areas, and smaller firms often focus on a particular area, such as financial services or market research. A consultant's life typically involves a lot of hours and a tremendous amount of travel. Work for a particular client can last for many months, and consultants are usually expected to be on site at the client's place of business during that time. In hiring, consulting firms seek candidates with strong analytical and quantitative skills, teamwork capability, leadership, interpersonal skills, and creativity.

In the area of finance, lawyers typically work for investment banks, hedge funds or in private equity/venture capital. These positions often involve researching investment opportunities, raising capital for businesses, advising companies on mergers and acquisitions, and other financial matters. Expertise in a particular sector, such as health care or technology, is often required. A career in finance is generally very demanding—weekly hours can often exceed 100, and the pace of the work and the amount of money being handled can be staggering. Finance companies are looking for students and law graduates who can handle that culture, who have knowledge and a strong interest in finance, and have good interpersonal skills.

Students interested in business opportunities should visit the [Business](#) section of the CDO website.

B. Legal Specialty Areas

Within each of the legal employment settings described above, there are a multitude of legal areas of practice available to pursue. Visit the [practice settings](#) area of the [Law Firms](#) section of CDO's website for links to numerous resources about legal practice areas. Another option for learning about particular practice areas is attending CDO's programs, especially the Law Firm Practice Area Forum, an event held in the spring, which brings in dozens of practicing attorneys to YLS to share career advice about their areas of work. Finally, many of the [Centers](#) at YLS focus on particular specialty areas, such as the Gruber Program for Global Justice and Women's Rights, the Information Society Project, the Solomon Center for Health Law and Policy, the Yale Center for Environmental Law and Policy, the Center for Global Legal Challenges, and the Center for the Study of Corporate Law just to name a few.

C. Employment of Yale Law Students and Graduates

1. Summer Employment

The summer after the first year of law school provides a wonderful opportunity to experiment and explore employment possibilities. Students typically use the first summer to gain some insight into what characteristics their ideal employer should possess. In addition, the summer is a good time to focus on obtaining a writing sample and references for future job searches. The vast majority of students (around 85%) spend all or part of their first summer working in the public sector, either with a government agency or public interest organization. Because most of these organizations do not pay, many students rely on [SPIF](#) funding (and for those working abroad, [Kirby Simon travel grants](#)) to support their summer public interest work. Only about 10% of first-year students spend all or part of their summer working for a law firm. Law firms typically provide generous stipends to summer interns, usually based on their starting associate salary. Several firms offer diversity opportunities, often geared toward attracting first-year students. CDO has compiled information about Law Firm Diversity Summer Opportunities [here](#). A few

students conduct research for faculty, work for a corporation, or serve as a judicial extern in the first summer. The [Employment Data](#) section of CDO's website provides [1L Summer Employment statistics](#) over the past five years and a [list](#) of where our most recent class worked in the 1L Summer.

The majority of first-year students secure positions for the summer by emailing a cover letter and résumé to prospective employers. Some students accept jobs from employers participating in the [Spring Interview Program](#) (SIP) at Yale or the Yale co-sponsored [Public Interest Legal Career Fair at NYU](#).

The second summer provides the opportunity to explore additional employment settings. In addition, many students obtain permanent employment offers from their second summer employers. The vast majority of students (around 75%) spend all or part of the summer working for a law firm, while typically one quarter will use all or part of the second summer to explore government, public interest, academic, or corporate opportunities. The [Employment Data](#) section of CDO's website provides [2L Summer Employment statistics](#) over the past five years and a [list](#) of where our most recent class worked in the 2L Summer.

The majority of second-year students obtain summer positions through Yale's [Fall/Virtual Interview Program](#) (FIP/VIP), while others participate in PIIP or take advantage of the Yale co-sponsored [Public Interest Legal Career Fair at NYU](#) or apply directly to employers of interest to them.

Some students will work for more than one employer during the summer, typically spending between six to eight weeks with each employer. Less than 10% of first-year students and around 20% of second-year students split their summer between two employers. For additional information about splitting the summer, consult the [Responding to Offers page](#).

Some firms offer students the opportunity to work for the firm for part of the summer and a public interest organization for the other part, with the firm paying the student's entire summer salary. See CDO's [Firms Sponsoring Split Public Interest Summers](#), for additional information about this unique split summer option.

2. Post-Graduation Employment

Yale Law School graduates have tremendous success finding interesting positions after law school. Over 40% of the graduating class serves as judicial law clerks to federal or state court judges either immediately upon graduation or within a few years after graduating. Approximately 35% start their careers with law firms, typically larger law firms in New York, Washington, DC, and California. Every year, many Yale Law graduates receive prestigious [public interest fellowships](#), including external fellowships like the Skadden and Equal Justice Works fellowships, and internal YLS fellowships like the Gruber, Liman, and Heyman fellowships. Other students are accepted into government or other public interest positions, including the Department of Justice Honors Program. When factoring in graduates' first non-clerkship employment choices, approximately 60% commence their careers with law firms and approximately 25% with public interest organizations or in government. See CDO's website for [entry-level](#) and [first non-clerkship employment](#) statistics and for a [list](#) of where our most recent class worked after graduation.

The Career Development Office seeks information from graduates five and ten years after their departure from Yale Law School through our 5th and 10th Year Career Development Surveys. Based on these survey responses, we know that just under half of our graduates are with law firms five years after graduation and around a third remain in law firm practice 10 years after graduation. Around one quarter are in public service five years after graduation and closer to one third are in public service 10 years after graduation. Smaller percentages of respondents are teaching and in business.

In addition to learning where our graduates are working, the 5th and 10th Year Surveys also provide insight about our graduates' level of career satisfaction. On average, 85% of respondents to our 5th Year Survey are either satisfied or very satisfied with their current employment. Ten years after graduation, nearly 90% of respondents are either satisfied or very satisfied with their current employment.

CHAPTER 3

EXPLORING OPPORTUNITIES

When deciding where to work for a summer or after graduation, you must reflect on your own values, skills, interests, and career and life goals. Do not try to fit any particular mold or someone else's idea of what a Yale Law student should or should not do.

A. Self-Assessment

Self-assessment is a useful first step of the career planning process. During a self-assessment you will gather information about yourself, including an analysis of your values, interests, and abilities that will enable you to make more informed career choices. This process will be valuable when considering both your short-term and long-term career goals. In addition, self-assessment can help you to identify what is most important to you in an employer and in a job, thereby increasing your chances of long-term employment satisfaction. Visit the [self-assessment](#) section of CDO's website for links to assessment tools. Learn from alumni by attending alumni panels at YLS, signing up for CDO's Mentor-in-Residence opportunities, and viewing [alumni and student online profiles](#). Speak with a counselor about your career goals and aspirations.

Below is an unscientific list of work qualities that may lead to greater job satisfaction.

- Intellectually challenging work
- Manageable hours and flexible work opportunities
- Feeling respected and appreciated
- Belief that work is meaningful
- Real responsibility
- Compensation structure that suits you
- Transparency about path to success and meaningful feedback
- Mentorship
- Shared values about work and life
- Positive colleague interactions
- Professional development opportunities

Surround yourself with varied ideas, people, and work; try out [Clinics](#); get involved with [Centers](#); join [Student Journals and Organizations](#), all with an eye toward defining your interests, skills, and values. Use your summers as an opportunity to continue to define and refine your career needs.

B. Research Employers

Now that you have some notion of what qualities you want in an employer, the next step is to research the market. Conducting employer research can be a time-consuming process, but the networking and research skills that you gain will be invaluable in your career. A plan is critical. There are thousands of potential employers to whom you can apply for work. To help narrow your focus, use the criteria you have developed based on your self-assessment to create categories of target employers.

After you have identified the general types of employers for which you would be interested in working, there are many resources available to learn about particular employers. Most employers have their own websites with plenty of information about their practices, clients, attorneys and more. The [Employer Research](#) section of the CDO website contains a list of resources students find most useful. Visit the [Career Pathways](#) section of the CDO website to learn about the resources most useful for each pathway.

C. Connect with Alumni

Yale Law School has over 13,000 alumni working in virtually every corner of the globe. When deciding where to work, be sure to tap into this resource for information. Start by reviewing the [Networking](#) section of the CDO website, including the [How to Network](#) advice. Some of the methods for connecting with our alumni include:

- *The Courtyard*. Over 2,500 YLS alumni from around the globe have joined the law school's alumni engagement platform. Students can search for alumni by area of expertise, employer, position, and geographic location to explore a range of career trajectories and seek guidance from alumni.
- *Yale Cross Campus*. Many alumni from Yale University and its graduate programs have joined the University's mentoring network and have offered to provide career advice to students and fellow graduates. These resources can be especially useful for students seeking information about non-legal career options. Log in using your Yale credentials and create a profile.
- *CDO Mentors-in-Residence Program*. During the year, CDO invites many alumni to visit YLS to speak on career-related panels. While here, those alumni often agree to meet individually with students to provide advice about their job searches. Because these sessions typically take place during the weekday, students should feel free to wear casual attire.
- *CDO, YLS, and Yale University programs of interest*. Throughout the year, CDO, the Law School, and the university host numerous programs in which students have the opportunity to network with attorneys in the legal field.
- The online [Alumni Career Profiles](#).

CHAPTER 4

APPLICATION MATERIALS AND PROCESS

After you have determined where you wish to apply, you need to put together your application materials. This involves drafting a résumé and cover letters, and perhaps assembling a writing sample and list of references. When drafting these materials, keep in mind that *every* piece of writing you provide to an employer will be viewed as a writing sample and thus should be technically perfect and well-written. The [Toolkit for Student Job Seekers](#) section of the CDO website provides detailed advice on application materials.

A. Résumés

In most cases, your résumé is your first contact with a potential employer. It shows not only your experience thus far, but also your accomplishments. Résumés should be concise, accurate, error-free, well-organized, clear, easy to read, and visually pleasing. Use a standard font such as Times New Roman, and a font size of 11 point. Keep in mind that the reader of your résumé will probably spend no more than 30 seconds reviewing it. To be effective, it must be brief while still offering enough information to interest the employer. Most law student résumés should be one page in length.

Review the [Résumé Advice](#) section of the CDO website, including the sample résumés, Frequently Asked Résumé Questions, and Sample Résumé Action Verbs. In addition, attend CDO's 1L Application Preparation program. With all that advice in mind, reflect on your target audience. Find out as much as you can about the types of projects in which you would be involved if hired. Based on that information, determine which skills you should highlight. You may choose to have a few résumés geared toward different types of employers.

B. Cover Letters

Like the résumé, the cover letter is a sample of your written work and should be brief (preferably one page), persuasive, well-reasoned, and grammatically perfect. Before crafting your cover letters, review the [Cover Letter Advice](#) section of CDO's website, including the Sample Cover Letters. In addition, attend CDO's 1L Application Preparation program.

A good cover letter:

- Tells the employer who you are (e.g., a first-year student at YLS) and what you are seeking (e.g., a summer intern position);
- Shows that you know about the particular employer and the kind of work the employer does (e.g., civil or criminal work, direct client service, “impact” cases, antitrust litigation);
- Demonstrates your writing skills;
- Demonstrates your commitment to the work of that particular employer;
- Conveys that you have something to contribute to the employer;
- Shows that you and that employer are a good “fit”; and
- Tells the employer how to get in touch with you by email, telephone, and mail.

C. Writing Samples

In an initial application, include a writing sample only if specifically requested. Many employers will request writing samples later in the interview process. Nearly all judges require a writing sample with the initial clerkship application materials. The best approach is to have a writing sample ready at every stage of the interview process in case it is requested.

Legal employers typically seek legal analysis; therefore, a memorandum or brief is preferred over a research paper. In addition, less outside editing is better, which is why previously published pieces are not automatically at the top of the list. Although the topic of the writing sample is generally not much of a concern, if you have a sample that relates to the employer's work, you may wish to use it. The ultimate criterion, however, is the quality of the writing. If you use a document prepared for a prior employer, obtain the employer's permission and make sure you have made all necessary modifications and redactions to preserve client confidentiality.

Although there is no definitive ideal length for a writing sample, 5-10 pages typically serves the purpose of demonstrating your writing ability. If all of your potential writing samples are much longer, consider using an excerpt (e.g., one argument from a longer brief) and providing a brief explanatory note in the form of a cover sheet.

A cover sheet is useful to give any necessary background information about your writing sample. For example, if you use a writing project prepared for class, give the name of the class and a brief description of the assignment. If you are using a document prepared for a former employer, explain that you have obtained the employer's permission and made all necessary modifications. Consult CDO's [Writing Sample Cover Sheet Examples](#).

D. References

In an initial application, include references only if specifically requested. Many employers will request a list of references at some point in the interview process. Students applying for public interest fellowships and judicial clerkships will most likely need to provide letters of recommendation with the initial application materials. Consult the [Public Interest Fellowships](#) and [Judicial Clerkship](#) sections of the CDO website for advice on securing letters of recommendation.

A list of references should include the contact information for two or three individuals who can recommend you for employment based on their personal experience with you as a student (preferably as a law student) or as an employee. Employers are most interested in references who can discuss you in terms of those skills important for the position, such as legal writing and analysis, ability to assume responsibility, and interpersonal skills. If you ask law school faculty to serve as references, be sure that they know you from class participation, conversations outside of class, or research or other independent work that you performed for them.

Prior to listing someone as a reference, have a frank conversation to be sure that he/she is comfortable with providing you with a strong, positive recommendation. Take the time to talk with them about your career interests as they relate to the employers who may be contacting them. In addition, provide them with a copy of your résumé so they can become familiar with your background and experience. Consult CDO's [Sample List of References](#).

E. Transcripts

At some point in the recruiting process, employers will likely request your YLS transcript. Employers request transcripts to view both your grades and your course selections. First-year students who are asked to provide a transcript should explain to employers that grades are

unlikely to be available before April, and that, pursuant to the law school's grading policy for first term, your transcript will show only credit or fail for each course. You can offer to send your transcript when grades are available, or to send an undergraduate transcript immediately if that would be helpful.

Courses are listed on your transcript as soon as you commence the course selection process. For first-year students, that means that spring courses will be listed on your transcripts starting the first week of December. If you think your course selections may be a selling point to employers, you may wish to hold off on sending transcripts until your spring courses have been selected.

Unless an employer specifically requests an official transcript, you can provide an unofficial transcript. On the back of an official YLS transcript is an explanation of the law school's unique grading system; therefore, if you send an unofficial version, you may wish to obtain a photocopy of the grading explanation from the Registrar. Requests for either type must be made online. There is typically a 24-48 hour turnaround time. Unofficial transcripts can be photocopied; official transcripts cannot be copied and only 10 may be requested at one time.

For additional information about transcripts please consult the Registrar's website.

F. Application Packet

In the absence of more specific information from an employer, at the initial application stage, submit a cover letter and résumé to express your interest in a position. Convert your documents into PDFs to avoid conversion problems. Before creating the PDFs, format your documents properly by using Word, a standard font such as Times New Roman, at least .5 margins, and tabs or justification instead of spaces for alignment purposes. Include the body of your cover letter in the email message and also include the cover letter as an attachment. Ideally you will attach only one PDF file that includes both your résumé and cover letter in one document. If you have questions on how to do this, contact CDO or IT services.

On the rare occasion when you are asked to send your application by mail, use good quality white bond paper with matching envelopes for printing your résumés and cover letters. YLS has a special paper printer designed for thicker stock located on L2 in the computer classroom. Students are welcome to use this printer but you must bring your own résumé paper. If you are including a writing sample, you can either fold the documents to fit a standard size envelope, or use larger envelopes. You do not need to use résumé quality paper for your writing sample.

G. Application Timing

1. Initial Contact with Employers

a. First-Year Students

In recognition of the importance of the first semester of law school in providing a strong academic foundation, Yale Law School policy states that first-year students shall not submit applications to prospective summer employers and prospective summer employers shall not consider applications from first-year students before **December 1**. Many larger law firms, national nonprofit organizations, and federal agencies typically wish to hear from students in December. Most other employers expect to hear from first-year students during the course of the winter and early spring. The Summer Employment Evaluations in CMS provide useful information about when students applied for, interviewed, and secured their summer offers.

Most first-year students contact employers directly when seeking summer employment, although

some obtain positions via CDO's [Spring Interview Program](#) in late January or the YLS co-sponsored [Public Interest Legal Career Fair](#) at NYU in February. We suggest that you send a wave of applications to your five to 15 top choices in December. Prepare a second and third wave as needed, as you work down your list of desirable employers. Once you accept an offer, you must withdraw from consideration by other employers.

b. Upper-class Students

Most second-year students use the [Fall Interview Program](#) (FIP/VIP) and/or the Public Interest Interview Program (PIIP) to secure summer employment. Some students (especially those seeking positions with employers in less popular geographic locations, smaller law firms, or public service employers) send résumés and cover letters directly to employers. Students typically commence this process in August prior to school and continue with waves throughout the fall and early spring as necessary. It is not unusual for upper-class students seeking public interest positions to be involved in the job search process well into the spring.

2. Follow Up

If you have not heard from an employer within two weeks of sending your cover letter and résumé, and you are still interested, call the employer to make sure that your letter was received and ask politely about the status of hiring plans. Smaller firms, public interest, government, and nonprofit organizations often are not well-equipped to handle the volume of applications they receive. Calling them demonstrates your interest and helps them remember you. Be mindful of the line between showing interest and being a pest. Do not be surprised if some employers do not respond to your inquiries until you contact them to check on the status of your application. Similarly, if you have interviewed with an employer and are awaiting news, feel free to follow up with a telephone call to reiterate your interest in the position and inquire about the timing of their hiring decisions.

Keep a record of your contact with employers: those who respond, the nature of their replies, your follow up, and the results. Your search may last a matter of weeks or months, and this record will be a valuable tool. It is a good habit for all job searches you undertake now and in the future. You are building your professional network, so touch base with contacts you encountered along the way and tell them about the work you ultimately select.

CHAPTER 5

INTERVIEWS AND FOLLOW UP

A. Interviews

During the interview process employers will learn about and assess your communication skills, your ability to present your experience and achievements in a precise manner, and your interest in their organization and its work. The key to a successful interview is preparation, including both research and practice.

You have two primary goals during the interview. First you need to determine whether this employer meets your career goals and objectives. Second, you need to make the interviewer aware of your unique qualities, interests, and skills. Employers prefer candidates who:

- Have thoroughly researched the employer and know why the employer and its work interest them
- Exhibit leadership
- Demonstrate good judgment and intellectual ability

- Are problem solvers
- Take an active part in the interview and are positive and enthusiastic

To accomplish these goals, visit the [Interviewing](#) section of the CDO website where you will find detailed interviewing advice, including information on employment sector differences, interview preparation, appropriate attire, dealing with inappropriate interview questions, and navigating callback interviews. This site also provides links to [Advice on Navigating the Job Search for Students with Disabilities](#); [Sample Interview Questions](#); and [Sample Law Firm Interview Evaluation Forms](#).

Law firms most typically cover reasonable travel expenses incurred for interviews. Most public interest employers do not. To support public interest students, CDO has a [Travel Reimbursement for Interviews in the Public Interest \(TRI PI\)](#) program. Under this program, CDO will reimburse the eligible and reasonable travel expenses up to \$800 per year for second-year, third-year and LLM students.

Yale Law School is committed to ensuring that its students receive fair treatment from employers who use its placement services, and that the law school, its students and employers act in good faith in the recruiting and hiring process. Please review CDO's advice on [Inappropriate Interviews and How to Handle Them](#) prior to embarking on the interview process.

B. Saying Thank You

Advice on whether to send a brief email of thanks to attorneys with whom you have interviewed is varied. In some regions of the country (i.e. the Northeast), thank you emails are generally not expected. In other locales (i.e. the Southeast), they are more common. If you do decide to send one, make sure it is perfect, as it will be viewed as a sample of your writing.

All that said, you may decide to send a short follow up email to persons with whom you met if: (1) you are extremely interested in the employer and would like to reiterate that interest; (2) you thought that you really connected with the interviewer and would like to remind that interviewer of your similar interests; or (3) the interviewer went out of his/her way for you (e.g., treated you to a nice dinner or reception meal). If you decide to write a follow-up email, you should do so promptly. Sample Thank You email language is available [here](#).

C. Responding to Offers

At some point in the interview process you will begin receiving job offers, and likely some rejections as well. Employers typically provide responses to students within a couple weeks of their interviews, although some will act more quickly and others more slowly. If you haven't heard within a couple of weeks, you should feel free to call or email and inquire about your status and the timing of decisions. Review the [Responding to Offers](#) section of our [Toolkit for Student Job Seekers](#) for detailed information about handling offers.

Included in Yale Law School's [Recruiting Policies](#) are Policies for Offers and Decisions which establish the amount of time employers should provide students to make decisions on offers. Employers and students are expected to comply with these policies. According to these policies, summer offers to 1Ls should remain open for at least two weeks following the date of the offer letter. The timing relating to offers to upper-class students depends on the circumstances so please review the Policies for Offers and Decisions closely to determine the timing that relates to your particular situation.

Typically less than 10% of first-year students and 20% of second-year students split the summer between two employers or two offices of one employer. Visit the [Responding to Offers](#) section of the Toolkit for Student Job Seekers for more information about splitting the summer.

CHAPTER 6

CAREER PATH ISSUES

As you contemplate the career options available to you, you will undoubtedly ponder myriad personal and professional issues. While these issues are best addressed in an individual counseling session, following are some of the more typical concerns we hear from students.

A. Debt Burden

Financial issues are important and real. Fortunately, YLS provides strong financial support for students interested in public service. Visit the [Financial Support for Public Interest](#) webpage for an overview of our support.

- [Summer Public Interest Fellowship Program](#) (SPIF) offers support to Yale students who need funding to work at government and non-profit organizations during the summer. The Law School provides fellowships of up to \$8,000 over the summer (\$666 per week for up to 12 weeks).
- [Kirby Simon Summer Fellowships](#) cover both travel costs and living expenses for students who undertake at least six weeks of human rights work during the summer.
- [Travel Reimbursement Interviews for Public Interest](#) (TRI PI) provides travel reimbursement (up to \$800) for 2L, 3L and LLM students who need to travel to conduct public interest interviews.
- [The Career Options Assistance Program](#) (COAP) allows students to choose public service and other modest salaried positions after graduation by paying all of their academic loans if they earn less than a set income threshold and partial payment for those with adjusted incomes above that threshold.
- [YLS Post-Graduate Fellowships](#) provide generous funding (typically \$50,000 for one year) to help students and recent alumni pursue public interest after graduation.

B. Moving Between Employment Sectors

Many YLS graduates work in multiple sectors during the course of their careers. It is not uncommon to find alumni whose career paths have included stints in law firms, nonprofits, government, and academia, to name a few settings. Having said that, there are some factors to take into consideration as you contemplate your career path and possible job changes.

- *Do you want to work for a public sector employer during your first summer and move to the private sector during your second summer?* Law firms know that our first-year students are typically most interested in public interest work for the first summer and usually have more public sector opportunities. Even when a résumé seems to indicate that a student has a predilection for public service, private sector employers will consider that student for employment. It is key for students to be prepared for questions about their experience and to be able to discuss why they are interested in working for the private sector employer.
- *Do you have a strong preference for a particular sector?* If you do, think about claiming it and pursuing your interest, rather than trying to hide it. Your strong preference will almost certainly be obvious to those who interview you, and they may reasonably question your

commitment to their type of practice. There certainly are students and graduates who deal with this dilemma honestly and successfully, some of whom choose to postpone working in their most preferred setting for two or three years. But it is important to recognize this choice, so that you can anticipate and handle questions asked by prospective employers.

- *Do you have a demonstrable commitment to public interest work?* Whenever you apply to a public interest organization you will be expected to demonstrate your commitment to public interest work. If you are applying to such an organization from a private firm, you will need to show how you have maintained this interest while working in the firm. You could do this through pro bono work and/or through other volunteer work. Keep as current as possible about the issues and events that are shaping the public sector in which you are most interested.
- *Do you have a demonstrable interest in work done by private for-profit firms?* If you are working for a public interest organization and think you want to transfer to the private sector, maintain your contacts with classmates and others in private practice and find out how others have made this transfer. Read business publications as frequently as possible. Keep in mind not only the transferable skills you have, but also those you enjoy using. Describe your work experience in the public sector not in terms of the substantive issues (poverty law, civil rights, etc.) but in a way that emphasizes skills necessary in the private sector, e.g., litigation, policy analysis, research and writing, grant- writing and fund raising (client development), effective client contact and counseling, project management, meticulous attention to detail, and ability to meet deadlines.
- *If you are working in a high-paying position, can you save some of your income?* If you adopt a lifestyle that is impossible to support on a lower salary, “golden handcuffs” may keep you from pursuing your preferred, but lower paying, type of employment. Remember the availability of loan repayment assistance through the COAP program.

C. Work/Life Balance

It is true that many people, both lawyers and non-lawyers, find it difficult to achieve balance in their personal and professional lives. Figuring out what you mean by “successful” can help you make decisions. Many government agencies, public interest organizations, and mid-size to small law firms offer the opportunity to enjoy a life outside of work. On the other hand, these positions will not pay the high salaries and may not have the same level of name recognition offered by large law firms. When determining how to structure your career in the law, it is important not to lose sight of your priorities and to understand that there will be tradeoffs along the way. For more information, read the Work/Life Balance section of CDO’s Assessing Law Firms advice.

D. Whether to Work for a Large Law Firm

Many of our graduates commence their careers in larger law firms. They take this path for many reasons including the salaries, the ease of obtaining these positions through the Law School’s interview programs, the perception that this choice leaves the most doors open, and the subtle (or not-so-subtle) peer and family pressure to work for a well-known employer. However, large law firm practice is not for everyone and is not a necessary credential if you are committed to working for a smaller law firm or in the public sector. Before making a decision, you should weigh and evaluate many factors, including training, autonomy, interest in substantive legal work, control over type of work, pro bono opportunities, hours, travel, potential for advancement, and personal fulfillment. Do not fall into the trap of allowing an easy job search, a high summer or starting salary, or the expectations of others dictate your career choices.

E. Whether to Serve as a Judicial Law Clerk

Over 40% of our graduates serve as a judicial clerk at some point in their careers. Students and graduates decide to clerk for many reasons, including to enhance their research and writing skills; to gain a mentor who can provide career advice, networking opportunities, and feedback on legal skills; and to get insight into the workings of the legal system, among other reasons. However, a clerkship is not necessarily the right choice for everyone. For example, for people who have interests in the law that are far removed from the courtroom, their time is likely better spent concentrating on developing more relevant skills. For some, delaying entry into a permanent legal position for financial and/or personal reasons does not make good sense. Although a clerkship is a useful credential for most legal jobs, but for a couple of narrow exceptions (U.S. Solicitor General's Office being one), it is not a requirement. Even if a clerkship is preferred, it is almost always possible to substitute other relevant experience, such as a government honors program, or, for budding academics, a publication. Don't let the frenzy and anxiety surrounding clerkship hiring compel you to apply without evaluating whether in fact a clerkship actually makes sense for you. Remember, the other side of the statistic – over 40% of our graduates clerk which means that over 50% of graduates do not!

F. The Impact of a Prior Career on a Legal Job Search

Although second career students have the easiest time if their former work settings relate to their current career goals, they are by no means limited to that approach. The records of previous graduates attest to the success of “second career” graduates of YLS. A few things to keep in mind:

- Be prepared to answer questions regarding your decision to change careers and attend law school, without being negative about your previous background and experience. For students with an academic background, be aware that employers may assume you intend to become a law professor. Enrolling in a clinical program or other volunteer activity to gain practical experience may be especially valuable for you. Such practical experience will demonstrate that you have an interest in actual law practice.
- Some of the prejudices against law students with lengthy prior careers include the assumptions that they will not be willing to start at the bottom in a new career or to take direction from “senior” lawyers who are nevertheless younger; that they may not be willing to “pay their dues” in another field after having done so once already; and that they may have more family and other obligations that will prevent them from being able to commit the same amount of effort as younger law students. To be sure, some of these prejudices are patently illegal and patently false. However, you need to understand that such assumptions exist and that you will have to decide how to deal with them. In a sense, you are lucky if an interviewer alerts you to his or her concerns, because you can address them. Most, however, will not even raise the usually permissible questions, such as, “whether you are willing to travel, work nights and weekends.” If they do not ask, you may wish to take the initiative and address possible concerns. Discuss these options with a CDO counselor before you decide.
- Give your résumé a fresh look. Think carefully about the words that you use to describe past experience and education. When considering whether to exceed the usual one-page résumé, you must be especially careful not to devote excessive space to items that may not help you in the law job market.

G. Job Limitations for Non-U.S. Citizen JD Students

JD students who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents of the U.S. face unique challenges in the job search process. To understand these challenges, review CDO's *Non-U.S. Citizen JD Students and the Job Search Process*. Typically, non-U.S. citizen JD students are able to remain in the U.S. for their summers through Optional Practical Training and/or Curricular Practical Training. For employment after graduation, many large firms in large cities are willing to work with international JD graduates to secure longer term employment visas. However, there are concerns that new travel restrictions that may negatively impact U.S. employment opportunities. International students should connect with the Office of International Students and Scholars (OISS) early and often to discuss their individual situations.