

What Yale Law School Graduates Do: A Summary of CDO's 5th Year Career Development Survey Classes 1996 - 2000

Starting with the Class of 1996, the Career Development Office has solicited information from each class five years after law school graduation. Combining the responses from all class years surveyed, we have received an overall response rate of 59%.¹ This report provides a summary of the data gleaned from all survey responses.

I. First Employment

Employer Type

Judicial clerkships are the most popular destination of our graduates after law school, with 48% reporting a clerkship. Looking at first non-clerkship job choices, the majority worked in law firms (63%), with 82% of those in law firms working with firms with 100 or more attorneys. Twenty-one percent of graduates selected public service as their first non-clerkship employment, with 45% working for a public interest organization, 31% working in federal government, 12% working in local government and 6% working for the state.

	First Job After Law School	First Non-Clerkship Job Choices of Judicial Clerks	First Non-Clerkship Job Choices
Total # of Respondents	574	276	574
law firms	34% (195)	59% of clerks (164)	63% (359)
judicial clerkship	48% (276)	--	--
public service	8% (47)	27% of clerks (74)	21% (121)
academia ²	3% (20)	11% of clerks (29)	9% (49)
business	5% (31)	2% of clerks (6)	6% (37)
other	1% (5)	1% of clerks (3)	1% (8)

Gender Differences in Employer Type

Only 2% of women (4 women) started their careers in business, compared to 8% of men (26 men). Over half of men started their careers with judicial clerkships, compared to 43% of women. More women than men went straight to law firms and public service.

First Employer Type	% of Women	% of Men
Total # of Respondents	241 (44% of all respondents)	311 (56% of all respondents)
law firms	39% (95)	30% (93)

¹ We received a 55% response rate from the Class of 1996, a 62% response rate from the Class of 1997, a 63% response rate from the Class of 1998, a 57% response rate from the Class of 1999 and a 59% response rate from the Class of 2000. Because some respondents did not answer every question, some statistics reflect response rates less than the overall response rate.

² Includes both teaching and non-teaching academic positions.

judicial clerkship	43% (104)	52% (163)
public service	12% (29)	6% (18)
academia	4% (9)	4% (11)
business	2% (4)	8% (26)

Employment Locations

Our graduates' first non-clerkship job choices are not very geographically diverse, with 60% working in New York, DC or California.

Top Three Employment Locations	
New York, NY	28% (157)
Washington, D.C.	20% (115)
California (including all cities)	12% (68)

Methods Used to Obtain First Non-Clerkship Position

Overall, 44% percent of graduates accepted a position with a law school summer employer while 42% used their own efforts to find their first non-clerkship employment. Among graduates who commenced work with law firms, 61% worked for a prior YLS summer employer. These figures demonstrate the importance of summer law firm employment to first job choices.

Work Schedules

Forty-nine percent reported working between 2,000 - 2,500 hours in their first non-clerkship position; 27% reported working more than 2,500 hours. Only 5% worked part-time or had some other flexible work arrangement.

Annual Salaries

Almost half (48%) of respondents who worked for law firms as their first non-clerkship position earned between \$75,000 - \$150,000 and 42% earned between \$150,000 - 300,000. As would be expected, public service respondents earned less, with 78% earning between \$30,000 - 74,999.

II. Employment Five Years After YLS Graduation

Employer Type

Five years after graduation the percentage of graduates in public service, academia and business increases and the percentage of graduates in law firms decreases when compared to first non-clerkship employment. Among those in law firms, the percentage in large firms decreases somewhat five years after graduation.

	5 Years After Graduation	First Non-clerkship Employment
Total # of Respondents	562	575
law firms	48% (268)	62% (359)
<i>less than 25 lawyers</i>	<i>10% (26)</i>	<i>4% (15)</i>
<i>26 - 100 lawyers</i>	<i>9% (25)</i>	<i>13% (47)</i>

<i>more than 100 lawyers</i>	77% (206)	82% (293)
<i>public interest focus</i>	4% (11)	1% (4)
public service	28% (156)	21% (121)
<i>nonprofit org/ assn.</i>	37% (57)	45% (55)
<i>federal government</i>	42% (66)	31% (38)
<i>state government</i>	11% (17)	7% (9)
<i>local government</i>	10% (16)	12% (14)
<i>other</i>	--	5% (5)
academia	13% (71)³	9% (49)
business	10% (59)	6% (37)
other	1% (8)	2% (9)

Gender Differences in Current Employer Type

Proportionally more men work in law firms, academia and business and more women work in public service.

	% of Women	% of Men
Total # of Respondents	231 (43% of all respondents)	307 (57% of all respondents)
law firms	45% (103)	51% (156)
public service	37% (85)	22% (68)
academia	11% (26)	14% (44)
business	7% (17)	13% (39)

Employment Locations

Five years after law school our graduates are still not very geographically dispersed, with 60% working in NYC, DC or California.

Top Three Employment Locations	5 Years after Graduation	First Non-clerkship Employment
New York City	27% (152)	28% (157)
Washington, D.C.	17% (97)	20% (115)
California (including all cities)	15% (83)	12% (68)

Methods Used to Obtain Current Position

Fifty-three percent of respondents reported using their own job search efforts to secure their current position, while 24% are with an employer who was a prior YLS summer employer. Of those in law

³ Although 13% report academic employment of any type, 10% report working in academic teaching positions, either as professors or fellows.

firms, 40% report that their current employer was a former YLS summer employer. Only 9% of respondents in public service positions are working for a former YLS summer employer.

Work Schedules

Overall, 48% of respondents report working 2,000 - 2,500 hours per year and 24% report working more than 2,500 hours per year. Those respondents hardest working are in business, with 38% working more than 2,500 hours per year. As with first non-clerkship employment, only a small percentage of graduates (6%) work part-time or flex-time in their current positions.

Employment Sector	% Working > 2,500 hrs/yr 5 Years after Graduation	% Working > 2,500 hrs/yr in First Non-clerkship Job
overall	24% (130)	27% (148)
law firms	27% (71)	26% (94)
public service	18% (28)	22% (26)
academia	17% (10)	16% (7)
business	38% (21)	64% (21)

Annual Salaries

Not surprisingly, business and law firm respondents report the highest incomes, with 65% of law firm respondents and 42% of business respondents reporting salaries between \$150,000 - 300,000. An additional 20% of respondents in business report salaries of more than \$300,000. The majority of respondents in public service (58%) earn between \$34,000 - 74,999; an additional 38% earn between \$75,000 - 150,000. Fifty-eight percent of respondents in academia report earning \$75,000 - 150,000 per year.

Plan to Stay with Current Employer

The most common response from graduates was that they plan to stay with their current employer for 1-3 more years, with 41% of respondents selecting that option. One quarter believe they will remain for more than 5 years, 21% believe they will leave within the year, and 14% believe they will stay for 3-5 more years.

Job Satisfaction

Respondents were asked to indicate their overall satisfaction with their current employment. Close to 80% of respondents are either “satisfied” or “very satisfied” with their current positions. Law firm respondents are the least satisfied with their current positions (24% “very satisfied”) and academics are the most satisfied (75% “very satisfied”). Law firm respondents in the Class of 1998 report greater job satisfaction than those in other classes, with 45% reporting that they are very satisfied with their current employment as compared to 17% of those in the Class of 2000, 25% of those in the Class of 1999, 24% of those in the Class of 1996 and only 14% of law firm respondents in the Class of 1997. Public interest respondents in the Class of 1999 report greater job satisfaction (70% “very satisfied”) than members of that Class in other sectors.

	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat Satisfied	Not Satisfied
All Respondents	44% (227)	34% (178)	17% (88)	5% (27)

law firms	24% (61)	39% (97)	28% (70)	9% (23)
public service	60% (90)	32% (47)	7% (10)	1% (2)
academia	75% (49)	20% (13)	5% (3)	--
business	49% (27)	38% (21)	9% (5)	4% (2)

Respondents were also asked to rate their level of job satisfaction with regard to 12 specific aspects of their work. Overall, respondents are most satisfied with the collegiality of their colleagues, with 54% of respondents indicating that they are “very satisfied” with that area of their work.

Law firm respondents are least happy with their ability to balance work and life, with 40% indicating that they are not satisfied with that aspect of their job. Only 17% of business respondents, 5% of public service respondents and 2% of academic respondents gave that response. Law firm practitioners are also unsatisfied with their lack of control over their work (21% “not satisfied”) and their billable hour expectations (19% “not satisfied”). On the other hand, law firm respondents are very satisfied with their compensation (50%) and the collegiality of their colleagues (49%).

Public sector respondents are very satisfied with the collegiality of colleagues (64%), their ability to balance work and life (54%) and their control over their work (41%). Similarly, respondents in academia are very satisfied with the control they have over their work (79%), their ability to balance work and life (70%), and the collegiality of colleagues (54%).

Gender Differences in Job Satisfaction

In looking at job satisfaction and gender, there is only one noticeable difference. Although fewer women than men are in business, those women in business positions are more satisfied with their jobs than men in business positions. Sixty-five percent of women indicated that they are “very satisfied” with their business jobs as compared to only 42% of men.

III. Public Service Employment

When looking at all the job choices of our graduates (not including judicial clerkships), it is interesting to note that 35% have worked in the public service at some point in the five years since graduation.

IV. Job Changes

On average, our graduates change jobs 1.9 times in the first five years after graduation, not including judicial clerkships. While 40% of respondents have had only one non-clerkship job since graduation, 43% are in their second job, 12% are in their third job, 3% are in their fourth job and, believe it or not, .5% (3 graduates) are in their fifth job.

With respect to graduates whose first non-clerkship position was with a large law firm (defined as “more than 100 lawyers”), 41% have left that position for another job. Of those who left, the most common next position was with the federal government (31%), followed by a smaller law firm (16%), and an academic position (14%).

V. Pro Bono

Respondents were asked to report their average *pro bono* hours per year in their current position.

Clearly, graduates in law firms are more involved in *pro bono* work than those in business.

Average Annual Pro Bono Contribution	Law Firm Respondents	Business Respondents
over 100 hours	24% (63)	14% (7)
51 - 100 hours	18% (47)	8% (4)
26 - 50 hours	16% (42)	3% (2)
1 - 25 hours	24% (63)	15% (8)
0 hours	17% (44)	60% (31)

The survey inquired about the factors that have contributed to and limited respondents *pro bono* hours. Respondents ranked personal satisfaction, followed by a sense of professional obligation as the factors most contributing to their *pro bono* hours. Workload demands and employer billable hour expectations were selected by respondents as the two most important factors that have limited their *pro bono* hours. Respondents were also asked to rank the activities at Yale Law School that positively influenced their *pro bono* commitment. Respondents ranked the clinics as the most positive influence, followed by summer and term-time public interest work.

YLS Activities Positively Influencing Pro Bono	
clinics	40% (171)
summer or term-time public interest work	25% (108)
public service student organizations	17% (70)
public interest lectures and programs	18% (74)

Finally, respondents were asked the following question: “Has an employer’s strong *pro bono* policies and commitment contributed to your decision to work for that employer?”; 45% percent replied “yes”.

VI. Debt

At graduation, 43% of graduates had a debt burden of more than \$75,000 and 27% had a debt burden between \$25,000 and \$75,000. More than one quarter have taken advantage of the Career Options Assistance Program (COAP) at some point since graduation. Approximately 40% believe that the need to pay off their debt affected their legal career choices.

Debt Burden at Graduation	
less than \$5,000	24% (140)
\$5,000 - 24,999	5% (30)
\$25,000 - 75,000	27% (155)
over \$75,000	43% (249)

Percent of respondents who used COAP	28% (162)
Percent of respondents who said the need to pay off debt affected their legal career choices	39% (227)

VII. Retrospective

Respondents were asked to indicate why they decided to attend law school. The three most popular choices were to create career options, to engage in the intellectual challenges of law, and to enter a career in public service.

Why did you attend law school? <i>(Select as many as apply)</i>	
To create career options	32% (388)
To engage in the intellectual challenges of law	29% (351)
To enter a career in public service	19% (232)
To defer making a choice about my career	8% (96)
To establish a lucrative career	8% (100)
Other	3% (30)

The survey asked respondents, “When you began law school, in what area(s) did you envision working when you graduated?” Fifteen percent expressed an interest in working in academia, 25% wanted to work for a law firm and close to half expressed an interest in pursuing public service. Respondents were also asked, “When you began law school, in what area(s) did you envision working five years after graduating?” In response to this question, fewer respondents indicated an interest in law firm work (15%) and more respondents indicated an interest in academia (20%). The percentage of students interested in public service remained the same.

Comparing this question to where graduates actually work five years after graduation demonstrates that more graduates are in law firms and fewer graduates are in academia and public service than what they planned.

	Where will you work when you graduate? <i>(Select as many as apply)</i>	Where will you work five years after you graduate? <i>(Select as many as apply)</i>	Current Employment
Law Firm	25% (219)	15% (121)	48% (268)
Public Service	46% (408)	47% (368)	28% (156)
<i>Government</i>	53% (218)	56% (205)	63% (99)
<i>Public Interest Organization</i>	47% (190)	44% (163)	37% (57)
Academia	15% (129)	20% (155)	13% (71)

Business	8% (72)	10% (80)	10% (59)
No Idea	7% (60)	8% (64)	

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