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<tr>
<td>Dechert</td>
<td>Ella Detrizio, J.D. 1984</td>
<td>Princeton, NJ</td>
<td>Business/Corporate Law, Securities, Venture Capital</td>
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<td>Latham &amp; Watkins</td>
<td>Michele Penzer, J.D. 1993</td>
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<td>Skadden Arps Slate Meagher &amp; Flom</td>
<td>Regina Olshan, J.D. 1989</td>
<td>New York, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cohen &amp; Grigsby</td>
<td>Marie Rivera-Johnson, J.D. 2005</td>
<td>Pittsburgh PA</td>
<td>Employment Law, Labor Law, Commercial Litigation</td>
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<td>Guerrieri, Clayman, Bartos, Parcelli &amp; Roma</td>
<td>Jeffrey A. Bartos, J.D. 1990</td>
<td>Washington, DC</td>
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### C. Southern Firms

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<td>Fisher &amp; Bendeck</td>
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<td>West Palm Beach, FL</td>
<td>Family Law, Appellate, and Corporate Litigation</td>
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<td>Lawrence &amp; Bundy</td>
<td>Allegra J. Lawrence-Hardy, J.D. 1996</td>
<td>Atlanta, GA</td>
<td>Class Action Defense; Complex Business Litigation; Insurance; Internal Investigations; Labor &amp; Employment; Litigation; Education, Government &amp; Civil Rights; Crisis Management; Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA)</td>
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<td>Spotswood Sansom &amp; Sansbury</td>
<td>Michael Sansbury, J.D. 2001</td>
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<td>Wyche</td>
<td>Jo Watson Hackl, J.D. 1988</td>
<td>Greenville, SC</td>
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### D. Midwest Firms

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<td>Goldberg Kohn</td>
<td>Stephanie Jacobs Luger, J.D. 2008</td>
<td>Chicago, IL</td>
<td>Banking/Finance, Business/Corporate Law, Real Estate</td>
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<td>Hinshaw &amp; Culbertson</td>
<td>Lora Zimmer, J.D. 2003</td>
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<td>Benjamin P. Clinger, J.D./MBA 2008</td>
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### E. Western Firms

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<tr>
<td>Allen &amp; Vellone</td>
<td>Jordan Factor, J.D. 2004</td>
<td>Denver, CO</td>
<td>General Commercial Litigation in Various Industries</td>
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<td>Coppersmith Brockelman</td>
<td>Sam Coppersmith, J.D. 1982</td>
<td>Phoenix, AZ</td>
<td>Transactional Law, Real Estate and Land Use, Business Organizations, Nonprofit Governance</td>
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<td>Cozen O'Connor</td>
<td>Charles E. Wheeler J.D. 1978</td>
<td>San Diego, CA</td>
<td>Commercial Litigation, Insurance</td>
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<td>Fenwick &amp; West</td>
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<td>Quinn Emanuel</td>
<td>Paul Slattery, J.D. 2012</td>
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<td>World One Law Group</td>
<td>Karol Brown, J.D. 1999</td>
<td>Seattle, WA</td>
<td>Business and Family Immigration</td>
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<td>Cleary Gottlieb Steen</td>
<td>Gamal Abouali, J.D. 1997</td>
<td>Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>Corporate Law, Mergers and Acquisitions, Capital Markets</td>
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<td>Fieldfisher</td>
<td>Christopher Mesnooh, J.D. 1983</td>
<td>Paris, France</td>
<td>Mergers and Acquisitions, International Technology Transactions</td>
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### G. Public Interest Law Firms

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<td>Brown Goldstein &amp; Levy</td>
<td>Jessica Weber, J.D. 2009</td>
<td>Baltimore, MD</td>
<td>Disability Rights, Civil Rights, Housing Discrimination, Wage and Hour Violations, Appeals</td>
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<td>Waltzer Wiygul &amp; Garside</td>
<td>Michael Brown, J.D. 2011</td>
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INTRODUCTION

More lawyers work in law firms than in any other sector of legal practice. Recent lawyer demographics indicate that 75% of all lawyers work in law firms.¹ Law firm practice is also a very popular job choice among graduating law students. According to the National Association for Law Placement’s national statistics, 51% of all law school graduates in 2015 began their legal careers in law firms.² Here at Yale, looking at our graduates’ first non-clerkship job choices, approximately 60% of graduates commence their legal careers in law firms.

The purpose of this guide is to provide an overview of law firm practice by discussing the variety of law firm practice settings, offering guidance for assessing law firms, describing the law firm hiring process, and providing advice on resources useful in the law firm job search process. The guide also includes perspectives on law firm practice from alumni.

CHAPTER 1
PRACTICE SETTINGS

Law firms 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. However, 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. As a result, it is impossible to characterize a firm’s size without also understanding its geographic location.

Within each of the law firm practice settings described below, there are a multitude of legal areas of practice available to pursue. Visit the law firms section of CDO’s website for links to numerous resources about law firm practice areas. One of the best resources, NALP’s Official Guide to Legal Specialties: An Insider’s Guide to Every Major Practice Area, is available only in print in the CDO library. The guide provides information about 30 major practice areas and addresses issues such as where you can find attorneys who specialize in these areas; what types of clients these attorneys assist; what types of daily activities flow from these practice areas; what steps to take to prepare yourself for a career in a particular practice area; and what skills are necessary to succeed in each area of practice. Additional practice area specific resources are described in Appendix A.

¹ Excerpted from Lawyer Demographics table at https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/market_research/lawyer-demographics-tables-2016.authcheckdam.pdf compiled by the ABA Market Research Department in 2016.
A. Large Firms

The clients serviced by large firms are most often large multinational corporations. To serve their clients’ needs, these firms are usually organized into many departments, with corporate and litigation often the two largest. Smaller departments may include tax, employee benefits (ERISA), real estate, bankruptcy, trusts and estates, intellectual property, and public finance. Because many of the legal matters addressed by these firms are substantial in size and often complex, cases are typically staffed with many attorneys. As a result, junior associates often work with a team of attorneys on a particular matter, and receive assignments and report to a more senior associate who then reports to the partner in charge of the matter. Because these firms have longstanding client relationships, associates (and sometimes even partners) are expected to handle the work of existing clients without worrying about generating new business.

Most of the companies that hire these firms are involved in business transactions that are both national and international in scope. As a result, these firms often have offices in more than one location in the U.S. and in cities throughout the world. In many firms, all of the offices operate similarly in terms of the nature of their work, the clients they serve, the salaries their attorneys earn, and the hours that they work. Other firms are comprised of many offices that operate more independently of each other. Students considering firms with multiple offices should research these issues on a firm-by-firm basis. For more about international offices, see Section F below.

Large law firms are a popular destination for Yale law students and graduates. The majority of Yale law students spend all or part of the summer after their second year with a large firm in a major metropolitan area—most typically in New York, DC or California. Many of these students will commence full-time employment with these firms after graduation or after a judicial clerkship. Results from CDO’s 5th Year Career Development Survey indicate that around 45% of graduates work for law firms five years after graduation.

Yale law students and graduates choose large firm employment for a variety of reasons, including their interest in living in a large metropolitan area; the perception that these firms have sophisticated practices, rigorous training, and offer mobility in the future; the relative ease of finding employment with these law firms by virtue of their significant on-campus recruiting presence, early hiring timetable, and constant need for new hires; and the prospect of a high income. On the flip side, alumni report that some downsides of large firm practice include the billable hour expectations; the competitiveness (triggered by the fact that the chances of making partner are slim); the lack of control over work and time; and the limited client contact for junior associates. According to CDO’s 5th Year Career Development Survey, only one-quarter of law firm respondents report being very satisfied with their jobs. These practitioners most frequently cite inability to balance work and life, lack of control over work, and high billable hour expectations as reasons for their lack of job satisfaction.

Consult Appendix A for a list of resources to assist you in learning about large law firms. Some of the more useful resources include:

- ALM Legal Intelligence Surveys, Lists and Rankings (click on “surveys, lists and rankings” if not taken there automatically). ALM provides access to rankings from publications like The American Lawyer, Corporate Counsel, and the National Law Journal. Popular rankings include the A List; AmLaw 100 and 200; Global 100; Midlevel Associate Survey; Pro Bono Survey; and Summer Associate Survey. Please see the Online Resource Tutorial on ALM Legal Intelligence for more information on navigating this site. This site must be accessed through Yale’s VPN.
• **Chambers and Partners.** The Chambers Guides rank lawyers and law firms within practice areas. Select from Chambers UK, Global, Europe, U.S., Asia Pacific or Latin America. Each guide is searchable by geographic location and practice area. Within each practice area, Chambers ranks firms by designating them as “Band 1– 6,” with Band 1 ranking highest.

• **The NALP Directory of Legal Employers.** Offers information about demographics, salaries, practice areas, hiring needs and employment plans of law firms, public interest organizations, government agencies, and corporations throughout the United States. This is also the best resource for locating recruiting director name and contact information for outreach.

• **Vault Career Insider.** After creating an account, students can access Vault’s multitude of law firm rankings and can also view and download PDF versions of Vault’s many career guides, including the *Guide to the Top 100 Law Firms*, guides to top firms by location, and guides to firms by practice area.

• **Yale Law Student Summer Employment Evaluations.** Use these evaluations to get the inside scoop on law firms from your fellow students. These evaluations are available through CDO’s Career Management System, which students can access from the Quick Links section on the YLS Inside Page.

**B. Mid-Size Firms**

Unlike the large firms in the major metropolitan areas, whose clients are often international in scope, mid-size firms thrive on generating business from regional clients. These firms typically represent both corporate clients and individual clients in a broad array of legal areas, including real estate, general corporate and litigation, environmental law, trusts and estates, and employment law. Because of the nature of their practices, cases are staffed with fewer lawyers, commonly with an associate and a partner handling each matter. As a result, associates often receive more client contact and a role in decision-making earlier in their careers than their colleagues in the larger firms. Mid-size firms sometimes expect senior associates to bring in clients. This usually means taking an active role in the community to develop relationships with potential clients.

Because their clients are typically regional in scope, the legal work conducted by mid-size firms is dependent on the legal issues prevalent in their area of the country. For example, oil and gas law is a common specialty in Texas; computer law and intellectual property (patent, trademark, copyright, licensing) are common in Silicon Valley; water rights is predominant in Western states; appellate, regulatory and lobbying work abounds in Washington, DC; and financial and international work tends to be most prevalent in New York.

Many of the resources listed in the large firm section above will also provide information about mid-size firms. In addition, go to the Vault Career Insider, and click “Best Law Firms” to view Vault’s Best Midsize Law Firms to Work For and its Top 150 under 150. The National Law Journal authors the Midsize Hot List that is available to students through ALM Legal Intelligence by clicking the “Surveys and Rankings” tab. **This site must be accessed through Yale’s VPN.** Another useful resource is www.martindale.com, an online directory of law firms containing information about firms of all sizes. Search for law firms by name, location, practice area and/or firm size. Search for lawyers by name, location, practice area and/or law school attended.

**C. Small Firms**

Small law firm practitioners can serve as generalists or can focus on particular areas of the law, such as intellectual property, tax, real estate, or family law. Some small firms tend to be truly general practice firms, handling everything from tort matters to wills to divorces. Typical areas of practice for smaller firms include employment, family, trusts and estates, personal injury and criminal law. There are also smaller firms with practices that are very similar to large law firms. The differences are that the matters
are often on a smaller scale and there are fewer people to handle the work. Because smaller firms may charge lower fees for their services, they attract more individual clients than corporate clients. In addition, smaller firms often represent clients who are plaintiffs pursuing claims against well-financed adversaries, while larger firms often defend the well-financed against these claims of wrongdoing.

Attorneys with smaller firms usually have more autonomy, more substantive work earlier in their careers, and more client contact than their counterparts in larger law firms. Attorneys in these firms are usually expected to bring clients to the firm more quickly than they would in the large firm setting. Although this is a generalization, smaller firms often place more emphasis on balancing work and personal time and less emphasis on billable hours. This is not to say that small firm practitioners do not work hard. In some firms, they work just as many hours as attorneys in large firms. However, there seems to be more of an understanding that a lawyer who has a healthy balance between her professional and personal life will be a better lawyer. In addition, attorneys in smaller firms are usually not earning the same salaries as their counterparts in larger firms.

In addition to the resources listed in the mid-size firm section above, use the following resources to learn more about small law firms:

- Fellow students with small law firm experience. Appendix E of this guide contains a list of small or regional firms where our students have recently worked and includes alumni and students who have agreed to serve as mentors. This list is also available on the law firms section of our website under CDO Law Firm Resources.
- Our alumni mentor network, YLS Career Connections found on CMS. Using the “Employer Type” field, you can search specifically for alumni with experience in smaller firms and public interest firms.
- The interview process. Ultimately, you may need to rely more heavily on the interview process itself to get a good sense of them firms that are best suited to you.

**D. Boutique Firms**

Boutique firms are law firms that concentrate their work on one particular area of practice. For example, some boutique firms concentrate solely on issues relating to intellectual property, others focus only on litigation. There are some distinct advantages in working for a boutique firm, including the ability to work with and learn from experts in the field; the added respect from clients, fellow practitioners, and often judges who assume that boutique lawyers know about their field; and the high salaries that many boutique firms offer to attract attorneys with specialized skills. The disadvantages include the lack of exposure to other areas of the law in which you may have an interest; the potential inability to address tangential legal issues faced by a client; and the possibility that significant statutory or economic changes will eliminate the need for your practice.

The Vault Career Insider contains law firm rankings by practice area by selecting “best law firms”. Although the lists include some general practice firms, many of the larger boutique firms are listed, especially in the IP boutiques, labor and employment, and litigation boutique sections. The National Law Journal authors the Appellate Hot List, IP Litigation Hot List, Litigation Boutiques Hot List, and Plaintiffs Hot List which are available to students through ALM Legal Intelligence by clicking the “Surveys and Rankings” tab. This site must be accessed through Yale’s VPN.

**E. Public Interest Firms**

A public interest law firm is a private, for-profit association of lawyers, like any other private law firm. However, public interest law firms are distinguished from private firms in that their primary mission is to
assist underrepresented people or causes, rather than to make money. This difference in mission creates a difference in billing practices and client selection. Clients may be chosen with more emphasis on their need for the firm’s services, and the cause their claim relates to, regardless of their ability to pay. Sliding scale fees, free work, attorney fee cases, and contingent fee cases are common.

Public interest law firms can be distinguished from public interest organizations by the fact that they are not 501(c) (3) organizations, and typically do not get significant grant, foundation, or government funding.

Having said all this, the reality is that deciding whether a particular law firm fits within the definition of a “public interest law firm” is not always a simple task. For example, there are many plaintiffs’ firms who represent individuals or members of a class on various matters, including personal injury claims. While this work is often your standard personal injury work not befitting a public interest designation, it sometimes involves claims with broader social issues, such as with defective consumer products. While some may not view this work as public interest in nature, others will see it as serving the needs of the underrepresented individual against the more powerful institution. The bottom line is that the definition is somewhat fluid and the determination of an individual firm’s classification will require additional research into the firm’s overall philosophy, its clients and cases.

Typical areas of practice for public interest law firms include plaintiffs’ employment discrimination, civil rights, criminal defense, environmental law, and disability rights. Because these types of cases are often not profitable, the firm may take other types of matters, such as medical malpractice or other tort cases, to help pay the bills. Some public interest law firms specialize in class actions, while other firms represent individual plaintiffs.

These firms are typically quite small. Like other small firms, cases are usually staffed by only an associate and partner, enabling associates to receive significant responsibility early in their careers. Because of their public interest nature, attorneys in these firms do not earn the same salaries as their counterparts in larger firm settings. Some of these firms align their salaries with the federal government salary structure, with starting salaries around $50,000. Other firms’ salaries are more similar to nonprofit organizations, with starting salaries in the mid $30,000 range, while others approach regular private firm starting salaries. At some public interest law firms, mid-level associates may earn as much as $135,000; at other firms, the salaries can be much lower. Billable hour requirements can run the gamut at public interest firms, with some alumni reporting annual billing between 1,700 and 1,999 hours/year and others at more than 2,500 hours/year. Read more about law firm salaries and billable hour requirements in Chapter 2 below.

In addition to the resources listed in the small and boutique law firm sections above, use the following resources to learn more about public interest law firms:

- The Public Interest Law Firms section of the CDO website
- Harvard Law School’s Private Public Interest Firm Guide
- www.psjd.org, which is a database of public interest employers. To locate public interest law firms, click Search and then under Advanced Search select “Search for Employer Profiles.” Select Law Firm—Public Interest Focus as the employer type. To narrow your search further you can select particular practice areas. Each entry provides contact information, an organization description, a link to the employer’s web site if available, and a link to opportunities if available.
F. International Firms

1. Where International Lawyers Practice

Many YLS students express interest in practicing “international law.” In a law firm setting, this may mean working for a U.S. law firm in the U.S.; working in the foreign office of a U.S. law firm; working for an international law firm either in the U.S. or abroad; or working for a foreign law firm.

U.S. law firms with international offices and international law firms (usually U.K. law firms such as Allen & Overy, Linklaters, and Freshfields) are the most likely to hire lawyers trained in the U.S. The clients serviced by these firms are usually companies based in the U.S. or conducting business in the U.S. As a result, these firms need lawyers trained in the U.S. to assist these international clients with their legal work. Foreign law firms, on the other hand, typically assist foreign clients who conduct little business in the U.S. These firms need lawyers trained and certified in their own countries. That said, lawyers assisting with international ventures may be asked to deal not only with U.S. law, but also with the equivalent laws in the other countries involved in the transaction. In these situations, U.S.-trained lawyers will typically seek the assistance of foreign lawyers. Occasionally, U.S. lawyers will become admitted to the Bar in a foreign jurisdiction.

In deciding whether to commence your legal career in the U.S. or abroad, there are a variety of factors to consider. By working for some period of time with the main U.S. office of a firm, you are likely to benefit from the training programs and the legal expertise of the attorneys, receive the most sophisticated legal work in a broader array of legal issues, establish a network in the U.S. that may prove useful in the future, and find it easier to make a lateral move to another U.S. law firm.

However, there can also be some benefits to commencing your legal career abroad. You are likely to have immediate access to a specialized area of international work and develop an expertise in that field, and you will more easily have the opportunity to network with other international practitioners. In addition, the sooner that foreign language skills are acquired and mastered, the sooner you will be able to negotiate deals, provide sophisticated legal advice on the laws of a non-U.S. jurisdiction, and generally become an indispensable element in transnational deals.

2. Typical Practice Areas

Typical areas of practice of international lawyers include international corporate (particularly mergers and acquisitions, technology and financial transactions), international dispute resolution, and international trade. In a typical M&A project, a U.S. lawyer will represent a U.S. company in acquiring one or more foreign companies. In this situation, much of the legal work will be based on the law of the foreign company’s country since that company is a creation of, and governed by, foreign law. In handling this project, the U.S. lawyer will deal with company law, labor and tax law, to name a few. She will handle very detailed negotiations over the contents of the acquisition agreement and, unless she is certified to practice in the foreign jurisdiction, she will seek the assistance of a foreign lawyer to explain the important aspects of the foreign law to the American buyer.

International corporate practice often encompasses technology issues, because an increasing portion of the U.S. international presence is driven by this sector. In a typical cross-border technology matter, a U.S. lawyer will represent a U.S. software company that licenses its technology to foreign companies or public-sector entities (i.e., Ministries, utilities or mixed public-private sector companies that are especially common in Europe). The foreign customer invariably wants their licensing agreement to be in their

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5 This section was written with the assistance of Christopher Mesnooh ’83, partner in the Paris office of Fieldfisher.
language and governed by the law of their country. As a result, the U.S. lawyer, with the assistance of her colleagues in the foreign country, must “localize” the agreements and adapt clauses in the standard U.S.-law agreements to make them conform to local law and practice. The contract, in addition to the maintenance and professional service agreements, must then be negotiated and the technology delivered to the foreign purchaser.

Financial transactions often involve international law, as more companies in the U.S. turn to the international capital markets for raising capital and foreign companies seek capital and the prestige accorded by listing on a U.S. exchange. For example, a group of U.S.-based financial institutions might undertake the purchase and securitization of millions of dollars of mortgages owned by a group of foreign banks. Or, a foreign investment bank may need assistance with debt and equity issues into the overseas securities market. In either situation, a U.S. lawyer will write and negotiate documents to secure the transfer of money among banks, governments, and companies, making sure that the deal does not violate U.S. law or international law. In project finance deals, developing countries may seek capital for infrastructure development. U.S. lawyers may be involved in these transactions by representing investors, construction companies, financial institutions, or even local governments.

However, it is useful to note that not all international work is corporate in nature. Another area of practice where U.S.-trained lawyers are highly visible is in international arbitration, which involves an alternative way of resolving disputes, usually between companies from different countries. Initially seen as less formalized and more rapid than traditional litigation, international arbitration is particularly popular in complex areas such as construction, infrastructure projects, and contracts involving public-sector entities. A U.S. lawyer working abroad can practice in this area without being admitted to the Bar of the country in which she or he resides, which makes it a particularly appealing field.

Litigating in a foreign country is yet another option but, unlike arbitration, requires admission to the local Bar as well as an excellent command of the local language, since the overseas litigator will be drafting pleadings, analyzing the evidence and arguing before judges in the local language and invoking principles of local law. As a result, few American lawyers, even those in the more dynamic legal markets of London, Paris, and Hong Kong, tend to litigate on a regular basis.

Lastly, international trade law is another area of private international practice. International trade involves transactions for goods and services that cross national boundaries. Trade practice involves both the Commerce Department, which decides whether imports are being sold at a fair price, and the International Trade Commission, which decides whether imports cause or threaten injury to a U.S. industry. In the U.S., this practice is centered in Washington, DC, where most law firms have a trade practice; in Europe, much of this work takes place in Brussels (as well as the national capitals). Although some U.S. lawyers handle international proceedings before dispute settlement panels established under the World Trade Organization, most deal with U.S. laws and regulations. More specifically, the practice is largely based on administrative law, often relating to antidumping laws. A U.S. trade practitioner may represent a foreign manufacturer in antidumping proceedings on high tech products in the U.S.; advise importers, as well as foreign governments, on U.S. textile and other trade policy matters; and advise U.S. industrial exporters on U.S. countervailing duty proceedings abroad.
3. Salaries

Many U.S. law firms provide their international associates with salaries comparable to their U.S. associates. In addition, some firms will pay a cost of living allowance to associates living in expensive international cities such as London. Generally, U.S. associates working abroad earn more than their international associate counterparts working for international firms. Because firms have varying salary structures for their international associates, it is important to discuss this topic prior to accepting an international position.

4. Resources

Chambers and Partners offers numerous international law firm directories covering the U.S., Europe, the U.K., Latin America and more. The online databases are searchable by firm name, individual attorney name, geographic location and practice area. In the practice area section, Chambers provides an overview of the practice area, ranks firms based on the practice area, and describes the work of each firm listed.

IFLR1000 is an online guide to the world’s leading financial and corporate law firms. The guide provides law firm and lawyer rankings by practice area and jurisdiction. After registering for free, select a region and then a particular financial practice area (including capital markets, M&A, project finance, private equity) to view rankings and descriptions of firms active in those areas.

To learn about U.S. law firms with international offices, the NALP Directory is a helpful tool. On the main search screen, check the “Law Firm” box and hit search. Then, in the sidebar “Refine/Save Your Search,” scroll down to “Other Location” and then enter the international city or country name. The search results will include all NALP law firms with an international office in the location you selected.

Appendix C of this guide contains a list of foreign offices that have employed YLS students in the past five years. Appendix D contains a list of current students with experience in international firms who have offered to serve as Student Mentors to students interested in these types of opportunities.

CHAPTER 2
ASSESSING LAW FIRMS

There are thousands of law firms around the country and the world seeking to hire law students. It is up to you to determine which firm will be a good fit for you. Establish the factors that are important to you in a law firm (e.g., intellectually-challenging work, livable hours, early responsibility) and then keep them in mind as you go through the process of seeking summer and permanent employment. This chapter offers you some suggestions for what you may wish to consider when selecting a law firm and mentions resources to help you make an informed decision. In addition, use our alumni mentor network, YLS Career Connections, to contact alumni and learn from their law firm experiences.

A. Firm “Culture”

For better or worse, you will spend more time with your work colleagues than with many of your friends and family. It is important that you respect their judgment, enjoy their company and believe that you can learn and develop into a good lawyer under their tutelage. Assess the firm’s “culture.” Is there a sense of collegiality? Are doors in the office open or closed? Are there photos of family, friends or outside hobbies in attorney offices? Are the attorneys of certain political affiliations? How do the attorneys treat the support staff? What opportunities does the firm provide for social and professional interaction among
You can assess a firm’s culture yourself through the interview process, and you can gain insight from students and alumni with knowledge of the firm. Use the following resources to learn more about a firm’s culture:

- **Chambers Associate** provides associates’ views of the culture of their firms.
- The **Vault Guide to the Top 100 Law Firms** also shares insight into firm culture.
- The **American Lawyer’s annual Midlevel and Summer Associates Surveys** (available to students under the “Surveys and Rankings” tab) assess firms based on associate job satisfaction, including relations with partners and other associates, the interest and satisfaction level of the work, training and guidance, policy on billable hours, management’s openness about firm strategies and partnership chances, the firm’s attitude toward pro bono work, compensation and benefits, and the respondents’ inclination to stay at their firm for at least two more years. This site must be accessed through Yale’s VPN.

### B. Clients and Legal Issues

For many practitioners, the types of clients with whom they have contact, the amount of that contact, and the types of legal issues confronting those clients have an enormous impact on job satisfaction. Some lawyers would prefer to represent individuals, while others wish to work on behalf of large corporate clients. Legal issues addressed by attorneys representing individual clients can include family law, employment, trusts and estates, tax, tort, civil rights, and residential real estate. Attorneys representing corporate clients are more likely to be involved in corporate legal issues, including securities, mergers and acquisitions, environmental law, and commercial real estate. They may also represent the company in employment and other contract matters.

Different areas of practice require different sets of skills. Do you enjoy analyzing complex statutes and regulations? Then perhaps environmental, telecommunications, or tax law is for you. Would you prefer to have little client contact and instead spend time researching, drafting motions, and arguing in court? Then maybe you should consider appellate law. Take a close look at the work being performed by the junior associates in a particular practice group for a better understanding of what your responsibilities are likely to be. Understand what your skills and interests are and then find a practice area that best fits you. Young associates who are unsure of what practice area is best may benefit from starting with a firm that offers a department rotation system or does not assign associates right away.

The following resources can assist in contemplating clients and legal issues:

- The Law Firm section of the CDO site references selected resources about law firm practice areas.
- Vault’s Online Library for YLS has law firm rankings, including practice area rankings. Click Best Law Firms. Vault also has a *Practice Perspectives: Vault’s Guide to Legal Practice Areas*, available under the “Vault Guides” tab.
- The website for Chambers USA contains practice area definitions under “Useful Links” and also ranks law firms by practice area. Chambers Associate has useful practice area descriptions.
- The NALP Directory and Martindale enable you to search for firms by practice area. NALP’s Official Guide to Legal Specialties available in the CDO Library
- MLA’s *Law Firm Practice Area Summary* and *Ten Questions to Ask Before Choosing a Practice Area*
- CDO’s annual Law Firm Practice Area Forum provides the opportunity for students to interact with lawyers representing dozens of practice areas.
C. Training and Development

The amount, type and quality of training that you will receive can vary from firm to firm. Learn about the training opportunities that are offered. Often, the larger law firms provide mock programs as a means of providing experience to new attorneys. Smaller firms, with cases staffed with fewer lawyers, are more likely to allow you to interface with clients early in your career and obtain more “on the job” training.

NALP’s Directory of Legal Employers provides profiles for law firms that include information about training opportunities in the professional development section. Virtually every large firm provides one or more of the following: in-house training, external firm-paid seminars, continuing legal education, organized formal mentor programs, observation opportunities, and practice group training. Most firms also offer trial advocacy training and retreats. Some firms go beyond the typical substantive training programs to also offer practical lawyering skills such as effective writing to clients and client presentations. Smaller firms also provide training and mentoring, although typically through more informal methods. For example, instead of a deposition skills workshop, a junior associate may shadow a senior associate during depositions to learn the ropes. To help determine how important training is to a firm, find out how involved partners are in the training process and how the firm credits hours devoted to training. Chambers Associate and the Vault Guide to the Top 100 Law Firms evaluate law firm training opportunities.

You may also wish to seek out firms who allow associates to contribute in a meaningful way to the firm and its clients. Firms who are serious about associate development have benchmarks for associates at each stage of their careers. They assist their associates in meeting those goals by staffing cases leanly and making sure that associates get to work on different types of matters with a variety of partners. Find out whether and to what extent associates are involved in firm business matters. Do associates participate in firm committees? Are they involved in recruiting? Do they attend business development meetings? If so, that serves as another indication that the firm is serious about developing its associates into leaders within the firm. Many firms have professional development directors to assist associates in navigating their career paths.

The attorney review process is also an essential part of associate development. Associates are more likely to thrive in settings where their expectations are clearly defined, their performance is periodically evaluated, and they receive regular feedback on their work. Most law firms implement some type of formal and/or informal performance reviews of their associates. Many firms employ annual reviews; others conduct semi-annual reviews. A small percentage use “360 degree” evaluations, where each category of employees evaluates all others. Self-evaluation is common, with firms requiring attorneys to sum up their own performance. Find out how frequently associates are evaluated and whether they are expected to seek feedback on their own or whether partners are expected to review all associates with whom they work.

D. Compensation and Benefits

The most common system of base compensation for associates is the set lock-step system, where associates in each class year receive the same base salary. Least common is the pure merit system, in which firms compensate attorneys according to their performance. In addition to these two systems, firms may use a combination lock-step and merit system or a variable lock-step system with a range per class year. Among the factors that may be taken into account in systems other than the set lock-step are the number of hours billed, quality of work, pro bono hours, overall contribution to the firm through activities such as recruiting and participation on internal committees, and business development. Consult firm
websites, the NALP Directory under the “Compensation & Benefits” tab and Chambers Associate to learn about a law firm’s compensation structure.

There are different views as to which system of compensation is better. The set lock-step system may minimize competitiveness, but it does not reward outstanding performance. Although the merit system compensates star performers, it may create pressure to meet or exceed performance goals at each level. On the other hand, a merit system might allow flexibility for an attorney to receive a lower salary in exchange for working fewer hours. Ask attorneys in firms of interest to you whether and how the compensation structure affects the firm’s work environment. It is also important to understand the partner compensation system because that too can influence a firm’s culture and attitude toward training and mentoring of its associates. For example, in firms that reward partners only for their client billable hours, partners may be less willing to devote time to associate development.

Actual salary levels vary widely among firms depending on their location and size. Some students see the salaries offered by the largest law firms and forget that there are other considerations in assessing employment opportunities. There is no question that large firm salaries are extraordinary, with starting salaries in large firms in New York and California around $180,000 plus bonus. One issue to keep in mind is that different cities can have vastly different costs of living. Although the NYC salary of $180,000 seems fabulous, it might be surprising to find out that a $160,000 New York City salary is equivalent to $75,106 in Austin, TX and $94,779 in Chicago, IL. Compare the cost of living in different cities with an online salary calculator.

In good economic times, many firms augment associate salaries with end-of-year bonuses. These typically have a merit-based component and may take into account hours billed, quality of work, overall contribution to the firm, business development, and pro bono hours. A handful of firms expressly consider other factors such as community activities and leadership. In addition, some firms offer hiring bonuses to entry-level attorneys who have completed judicial clerkships; the overall compensation package depends on the time credited for the clerkship and the resulting class year in which the attorney is placed. Although it may not be of immediate concern to you, more firms are starting to provide longevity bonuses and sabbaticals to associates who remain with the firm for at least five or six years.

In addition to salaries and bonuses, benefits make up an important part of any compensation package. Click on the “Compensation & Benefits” tab in the NALP Directory to view the benefits offered by firms. Typical benefits include a 401(k) plan, health and dental insurance, family leave, relocation expenses, and long term disability insurance. Some firms also provide workout facilities, on or off-site childcare, dry cleaning, meals for those working after hours, and more.

### First Year Associate Salaries

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<tr>
<td>50 or fewer</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-100 lawyers</td>
<td>$118,500</td>
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<td>101-250 lawyers</td>
<td>$115,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>251-500 lawyers</td>
<td>$150,000</td>
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<td>501-700 lawyers</td>
<td>$160,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>over 700 lawyers</td>
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*2017 Associate Salary Survey, NALP (2017)*

E. Billable Hours

It is also important to understand that the high salaries of the large firms come at a high price—billable hours. Law firms make money by billing their clients by the hour for their services (litigation contingency fees and other methods of billing do exist, but even associates in these areas must keep track of their billable hours). The more hours billed by the attorneys, the greater the profits for the firm. Attorneys must keep track (usually in six-minute increments) of the time they spend working on each client’s behalf. Some firms provide information about “target,” “expected,” “minimum,” or “average” billable hour requirements for associates on their NALP Directory profile under the “Hours & Work Arrangements”
Those figures are typically between 1,800 and 2,500 hours per year. For a detailed description of the
toll it takes on your life to bill 1,800 or 2,200 hours per year, see CDO’s *The Truth about the Billable Hour* advice.

Generally speaking, students who hope to be involved in outside activities, or who simply do not wish to
spend so many hours working, should consider working for a smaller firm, in a smaller city, or both.
Although salaries for these firms are not as high as those offered by the largest firms, they are still more
than enough to live on, and the trade-off in terms of improved lifestyle may be well worth it. In addition,
a few firms are experimenting with alternative billing structures for associates such as providing more
than one billable hour track. Associates can opt for the greater billable hour track thereby receiving more
compensation, or they can opt for fewer hours at less pay. Time will tell how these new systems will fare.

F. Pro Bono and Split Public Interest Summer Opportunities

Pro bono comes from the Latin “pro bono publico” and means “for the public good.” The ABA defines
pro bono legal services as providing legal assistance without expectation of pay to persons of limited
means or to organizations in matters addressing the needs of persons with limited means. Most firms view
this more broadly to include work for nonprofits and for social causes such as civil rights and the
environment. Many students who decide to pursue positions with law firms specifically seek firms that
offer meaningful pro bono opportunities.

Firms provide a great deal of information touting the opportunities they offer for students and attorneys to
pursue pro bono work. The formats of these programs differ widely, as do the levels of commitment and
organization on the part of firms. There are five main attributes to look for in assessing a firm’s pro bono
program:

- A meaningful and sensible definition of pro bono
- A strongly written pro bono policy
- Institutional support and partner role models
- Associate initiative and input into pro bono commitments and firm priorities
- Crediting pro bono hours on the same basis as billable hours

Refer to CDO’s *Critically Evaluating Pro Bono Policies and Programs*, for suggestions on how to
evaluate a law firm’s commitment to pro bono work. Additional useful resources include:

- Law firm profiles in the NALP Directory under the “Pro Bono/Public Interest” tab.
- Chambers Associate, which includes pro bono as a category within each firm’s profile.
- Vault’s Guide to Law Firm Pro Bono Programs available online.
- The American Lawyer’s annual Pro Bono Survey and Pro Bono Hot List are available through ALM
  Legal Intelligence under “Surveys & Rankings”. This site must be accessed through Yale’s VPN.

There are many ways to explore pro bono work during the summer, including working for a firm that
offers a sponsored split public interest summer. Participating firms allow summer associates to work part
of the summer at the firm and the other part at a public interest organization, with the firm paying the
entire summer’s salary. If you seek community focused, pro bono friendly firms, you should consider
working with a firm that offers a sponsored summer program. See CDO’s resource, *Firms Sponsoring
Split Public Interest Summer Programs*, for a listing of firms that offer these opportunities.
G. Diversity Efforts

Below is a list of resources you can use to learn about the efforts firms are making to increase the diversity of their attorneys and how successful those efforts have been.

- **ALM Legal Intelligence Surveys and Rankings** related to diversity (available to students through under the Surveys and Rankings tab). This site must be accessed through Yale’s VPN. It includes the Diversity Scorecard with detailed information on minority legal staffing levels at NLJ 250 and Am Law 200 firms; the Am Law 200 Women in Leadership survey; the NLJ LGBT Scorecard and more.
- **Vault’s list of the “Best Law Firms for Diversity”** and separate lists for women, minorities, LGBT, and individuals with disabilities. These lists are available online at by clicking Best Law Firms.
- **Use the Vault and the Minority Corporate Counsel Association’s Law Firm Diversity Database** to learn more the hiring, leadership and attrition of diverse attorneys at law firms.
- **Chambers Associate** provides information on diversity in its firm descriptions.
- **NALP’s Diversity Best Practices Guide** provides best practices for diversity in the areas of leadership; retention, culture, and inclusion; professional development; and recruitment. It’s available through by clicking the “Resources & Initiatives” tab in the “Diversity & Inclusion” section. The guide also shares information about specific law firm diversity initiatives.
- **Through the NALP Directory** you can access demographic information on firms and read descriptions of their diversity recruitment and retention efforts. According to that data, most firms participate in minority job fairs and bar-sponsored programs, recruit at schools with large minority enrollments, and communicate with law student groups. Some firms sponsor programs such as minority moot court competitions and diversity scholarships. To retain diverse attorneys, some firms make direct mentoring efforts and involve employer committees.

Sometimes simply looking at a firm’s website will give you insight into their diversity efforts. For example, some firms include a specific section on diversity, which may highlight the firm’s recruiting efforts, provide its non-discrimination policy, and describe its support of diverse law students and attorneys. Find out whether diverse attorneys are members of the law firm’s leadership. Finally, when scheduling callback interviews, ask to meet with diverse attorneys. Ask them how the firm supports an open and affirming environment for all lawyers.

H. Work/Life Balance Policies

How firms deal with work/life balance issues is often an important consideration for students. One way to assess a law firm’s work/life balance efforts is to learn about their parental leave and flexible work policies. Keep in mind that while most large firms have written policies in place, many smaller firms handle these issues just as well, but on a more ad hoc basis. In addition, remember that work/life balance policies are meaningless if the firm either implicitly or explicitly discourages attorneys from utilizing them.

Most large firms have written parental leave policies that include coverage of adoptions and children of domestic partners. In addition to offering leave, some firms provide a stipend to defray the cost of adoption. Firms may base their policies on gender or the attorney’s status as primary caretaker. Find out whether a non-primary caretaker is eligible for leave. Even for those attorneys eligible for leave, whether the leave is paid and the duration of that leave will vary from firm to firm. Beyond learning the specifics of the firm’s leave policy, find out what effect, if any, taking a leave has on advancement in the firm. Inquire whether attorneys who have taken a leave have continued to progress on the partnership track and/or have gone on to make partner.
Typical types of flexible work options offered by firms include part-time, telecommuting, flex-time, and job sharing, with part-time work being the most common option. Some firms require attorneys to provide justification for seeking alternative work options. Of the firms that offer these options, almost all allow them for attorneys with family obligations (children, spouses, or dependent parents); fewer firms allow attorneys to exercise these options for personal reasons. Firms may restrict the availability of an alternative work arrangement to attorneys who have worked at the firm for a specified amount of time (often one-year). In some firms, certain practice groups are more amenable to attorneys working an alternative schedule than other groups. Some firms require that a part-time attorney work a certain percentage of hours of a full-time attorney (often 60%). If the attorney exceeds his/her agreed upon hours, some firms compensate the attorney with additional time off, some provide a salary adjustment, and others add that factor when considering end of year bonuses. A few firms limit offers of partnership to full-time attorneys.

Useful resources include:

- Yale Law Women’s Top Ten Family Friendly Firms Report
- Working Mother/Flex-Time Lawyers Best Firms for Women List
- NALP Directory provides information in each firm’s profile, in the “Hours & Work Arrangements” tab, regarding alternative work options and non-traditional track attorneys.
- Center for Work/Life Law at UC Hastings has a variety of resources on work/life balance.
- “Cheat Sheet” by Flex-time Lawyers provides sample questions to ask prospective employers relating to the following topics: statistical and background information; partnership and advancement; leadership and accountability; business development and networking; workplace flexibility; and mentoring.

I. Partnership Track

While you may or may not intend to remain at a firm through partnership, it is still important to understand the partnership process and structure at firms. Traditionally, law firms had only one type of partner—an equity partner who shared in the profits of the firm. Now, many firms have two tiers of partnership. They have nonequity partners who do not share in the profits of the firm and are not the firm decision-makers, in addition to equity partners. Also, the number of years it takes to make nonequity or equity partner varies from firm to firm. Find out what that is. Some firms will hire lateral partners while other firms tend to promote only from within. The NALP Directory provides partnership track information under the “Partnership & Advancement” tab. NALP has also authored The Emergence of Nontraditional-Track Lawyer Career Paths: A Resource Guide for Law Firms and Law Schools.

J. Law Firm Rankings and Reputation

As has been referenced above, law firms are ranked in a whole host of ways. Through ALM Legal Intelligence, you have access to surveys, lists and rankings including The AmLaw 100 and 200; the law firm “A-List”; the Midlevel Associates Survey; and the Summer Associates Survey, just to name a few. Visit ALM Legal Intelligence under the Surveys and Rankings tab. Vault also provides various rankings (available through the Vault Online Library) including the Top 100 Law Firms; The Best 20 Firms to Work For; regional rankings; diversity rankings and more. (ALM and Vault must be accessed through Yale’s VPN.) Chambers USA ranks firms by practice area. While these rankings may provide you with some guidance in determining which firm is right for you, it is critical that you have some understanding of the universe of employers being ranked (typically only the largest law firms); the criteria used to create the ranking (subjective attorney opinions or objective data); and the agenda of the publisher (if any). Use rankings as one source of information about potential employers, but do not assume that just because a firm ranks well that it will be right for you.
Some students start their law firm research by gauging the relative “prestige” of law firms, and then aim to work at the most “prestigious” firm they can find. The problem with that approach is that as with beauty, prestige is in the eye of the beholder. Simply because a firm ranks #1 on the *AmLaw 100* list (for example), does not necessarily make it a better place for YOU to work than a firm that isn’t even on the list. If you want to maximize your chances of securing employment with a law firm best suited to your personality, work style, and practice interests, you cannot cut corners by relying on someone else’s definition of prestige.

**K. Transition Opportunities**

For some students, an important factor in selecting a law firm is what opportunities that position will afford them when they decide it is time to move on. Perhaps you want to transition to a different type of law firm, a public sector position, or legal academia after a few years. While all of these are viable options, there are certain factors you should keep in mind as you chart your career path. First, review CDO’s *Tips for Maximizing your Time in Big Law*. Use our alumni mentor network, *YLS Career Connections*, to view the varied career paths of our graduates. In addition, many firms devote a section of their websites to their “alumni,” depicting the career paths of attorneys who have left their firms for other opportunities.

1. **Large Firm to Small Firm or Public Interest**

   Most students assume that after a stint with a large, well-known law firm, smaller law firms and public interest organizations would be eager to hire them. That is not always the case. Fortunately, as a YLS graduate, you have a leg up on the rest of the market. However, what will be most important to the smaller firm or public interest organization, especially if you have worked in a large firm setting for a few years or more, is the type and quality of work you’ve been involved in. If you have spent four years working only on international mergers and acquisitions and are now seeking a position with a small plaintiffs’ employment firm, you will likely have a challenging transition. Don’t simply rest on your laurels. If you know you eventually want to work in the employment arena, take advantage of every opportunity your large firm offers to learn about that field—do pro bono projects, attend the employment group’s practice meetings, participate in bar activities relating to the subject. Then, when the time comes for you to make the transition, you will have substantive experiences to point to. For public interest employers, your résumé needs to demonstrate commitment to public interest; your experience with a corporate law firm may not demonstrate the needed skills or knowledge. Again, be sure you do lots of pro bono work, and maintain and cultivate contacts in the public interest community. Finally, don’t get stuck with golden handcuffs—live within a tight budget knowing that once you make the transition, your big firm salary will be a thing of the past.

2. **Small Firm or Public Interest to Large Firm**

   At some point in your job search you will likely hear that you should start with a large firm because you can always transition to a smaller firm or public interest, but that you cannot go from one of those organizations to a large firm. In terms of the ease of finding large firm work, it is true that you will never again have the Fall Interview Program, with its wealth of large firms at your fingertips. However, if your legal experience relates to the work of the large firm such that you can tell a compelling story as to why they should hire you, there is no reason that you can’t make that transition. Litigators in the public interest often make smooth transitions to private practice. Similarly, attorneys who have developed knowledge of government regulation in an area of interest to a firm often make lucrative career changes. To the extent that your experience is unrelated to your desired large firm job, and you have been in that position for a
significant period of time, you must work harder to change jobs. The issue is not really private versus public, but moving to fields where the skills, knowledge and contacts gained in your work experience are relevant.

3. Law Firm to Academia

If you are interested in going on the law teaching market, there are many factors that will be significantly more important to your candidacy than the type of law firm where you work after completing law school. These factors include publications, judicial clerkship experience, additional advanced degrees, and recommendations. In fact, while several years of practice experience is generally an asset in the law teaching market, candidates with four or more years often face more challenges on the market. For additional information about law teaching, read CDO’s guide *Entering the Law Teaching Market*.

CHAPTER 3
GETTING HIRED

A. The Hiring Process Generally

The basic steps of the job search process are fully discussed in the *Introduction to Career Development* guide. However, there are a few aspects of the law firm job search that deserve special attention.

Large law firms in major metropolitan areas have organized summer programs for which they will hire many second-year students and a handful of first-year students as “summer associates.” For example, last summer, Sullivan and Cromwell hired 140 second-years and a small handful of first-years as summer associates. These firms typically make permanent job offers to their second-year summer associates in the hopes of having them return upon their graduation or upon completion of a judicial clerkship. For those firms that hire first-years, some make permanent job offers at the end of the summer, while others give an offer to return for part of the following summer. In general, smaller firms hire few, if any, summer associates and are more likely to hire those students permanently only if their workload demands it.

Some first-year students who seek large firm summer positions get discouraged when those opportunities do not come their way for the summer. This is the nature of large firm hiring—those same firms are typically eager to interview those same students in their second year. First-year students who have the most success landing law firms positions for the summer focus their job search efforts in their home towns. This is especially true for students who are not from large metropolitan areas such as New York City, Washington, DC, or Los Angeles. Appendix B contains a list of law firms who have recently hired first-year students.

If you have your heart set on working for a law firm, but are unsuccessful in securing a law firm position for your first summer, consider working for an organization that will enable you to improve your knowledge base and skills in the practice area of interest to you. For example, if you are interested in litigation, consider working for a district attorney or U.S. Attorney for summer. If you are interested in securities law, pursue an internship with the SEC. Ultimately, law firms don’t really care where you worked your 1L summer, but it makes for an easier interview experience if you have done work that aligns with your interests.
1. Timing

NALP guidelines restrict first-year students from contacting employers to apply for employment until December 1. At that point, students may feel free to commence applying to law firms. Larger firms hiring first-year students expect to hear from them in December or early January and are likely to make offers by February. The NALP Directory provides information under the “Recruitment and Hiring” tab about whether a firm plans to hire first-year students, and if so, when they wish for them to apply.

Second- and third-year students interview with large firms during Yale’s Fall Interview Program in August, in which over 100 employers (mostly larger law firms) interview for summer and permanent positions. That hiring is typically completed by the end of September. Consult NALP’s Standards for the Timing of Offers and Decisions for more information about the timing of offers and when students must make decisions. Smaller law firms typically hire students on a later time frame, and often only when they have a particular need. First-year students interested in applying to these firms should commence their job searches in December, but may need to continue reaching out to employers well into the spring. Upperclass students should conduct their research and begin applying to smaller firms in the fall, keeping in mind that it may be April, May, or after graduation before hiring decisions are made.

2. Credentials

Law firms generally seek students who are intelligent, motivated, mature, articulate, confident, and enthusiastic about the firm and the practice of law. Firms generally do not hire students, especially first-year students, based on their legal acumen. Instead, they seek candidates who have the basic skills necessary to succeed with the hope that those students will develop into good lawyers. Some firms with specialized practices seek students with particular backgrounds (e.g., engineering or biochemistry for intellectual property), but these firms are the exception, not the rule. Law firms are also keen on hiring students who are likely to return to the firm after the summer. As a result, demonstrating a sincere interest in the location of the firm and the firm’s practice are keys to success.

For many large firms, law school grades are a factor in assessing a candidate’s qualifications. When interviewing Yale students, a firm may want to see one or more honor on a student’s transcript. For smaller firms, the candidate’s fit with the firm, good judgment, and ability to hit the ground running are often primary considerations. Public interest law firms seek a demonstrated commitment to the work of the firm. Law firms hiring students for a foreign office seek relevant language skills. See Appendix F for sample law firm candidate evaluation forms to learn how law students are judged by firms during interviews.

3. Application Materials

All law firms expect to see the résumés of students applying for summer or permanent positions. Law firm résumés should be tailored, when possible, to demonstrate an interest in the substantive work of the firm, experience with the types of clients served, and the ability to research and write effectively. Refer to the Credentials section above and gear the content and descriptions on your résumé toward demonstrating those qualities.

Students applying for positions through either the Spring or Fall Interview Programs need not provide employers with cover letters. For all other job searches, a cover letter is necessary. Like the résumé, the cover letter is a writing sample and, as such, should be brief (preferably one page), persuasive, well-reasoned, and grammatically perfect. If the firm has a recruiting department (as most larger firms do), direct the cover letter to the recruiting director. For firms without recruiting departments, use the firm’s
website or call the office to find out to whom you should direct your letter. When applying to a foreign office of a U.S. law firm, cover your bases by emailing a letter and résumé to both the international office and the recruiting director in the main U.S. office. Check their web sites for application instructions. For specific résumé and cover letter advice, including samples, consult CDO’s *Introduction to Career Development* guide.

At some point in the interview process, firms may request a writing sample, a transcript, and/or a list of references. Most often firms want only a transcript at the initial interview and may request a writing sample and/or list of references at a later stage of the interview process. Some law firms do not request those materials at all. The smaller the firm, the more likely it is that they will want to see these materials. Law firms interviewing at the Spring or Fall Interview Program inform students, through the CMS web site, which materials they wish for students to bring to their interview. Consult CDO’s advice *Basics of Writing Samples, Transcripts and References* for further advice on preparing these documents.

### 4. Interviews

Law firm interviews are not known for being particularly rigorous. The interviews are a conversation, with the interviewer using your résumé to ask questions to see if you have a sincere interest in their practice and if you would be a good fit with their firm. Substantive legal questions are rarely asked. Large firm interviewers may refer to your transcript during the interview as well. By reviewing the list of courses you have taken, the interviewer can assess the sincerity of your interest in the firm’s practice areas. Because large firms are typically grade conscious, they may also use your transcript to see whether you have any honors.

Your first interview with a prospective law firm is usually called a “screening interview.” Screening interviews can be at the firm, but more typically take place during an interview program, such as the Fall Interview Program. During FIP, screening interviews are 25 minutes in length. In other settings, they may last as long as an hour. If the screening interview is viewed positively by the firm, the usual next step is to invite a candidate to the firm for a “callback” interview.

During a callback interview, the firm has already seen your résumé and talked with you, is impressed with you, and has chosen to spend a substantial amount of time to get to know you better. Typical callback interviews last for half of a day, and involve you meeting individually for 20 to 30 minutes with four or more attorneys. The firm will often have two or more junior attorneys take you out to lunch after the interviews are completed.

Useful interview advice resources include:

- CDO’s *Introduction to Career Development* guide.
- CDO’s interviewing advice available on our website in the Toolkit for Jobseekers. Appendix F of this guide contains sample law firm candidate evaluation forms.
- “The Cheat Sheet,” written by Deborah Epstein Henry of Flex-Time Lawyers provides ideas about questions to ask law firms related to statistical and background information; partnership and advancement; leadership and accountability; business development and networking; workplace flexibility; and mentoring.

### 5. Splitting the Summer

Some firms allow students to split their summer between two employers. The NALP Directory, under the “Recruitment & Hiring” tab in the Summer Associate Hiring Questions section, asks employers to indicate whether they will allow students to split the summer, and if so, how many weeks the student is
required to spend at their firm. If a firm allows their summer associates to split with another employer, they may place limitations on that split, including requiring that the other employer not be another firm; requiring that the student spend the first half of the summer with their firm; and/or requiring that the student spend a certain number of weeks with their firm (typically seven or eight). Some firms allow students to split the summer between two different offices of their firm. This happens most typically when the firm has a U.S. and international office. Students can inquire about this type of opportunity at interviews. The possibility of splitting your summer between two different law firms is remote—most firms require the first 6-8 weeks, and most firms end their summer programs in early August. On top of that, you may wish to participate in FIP in early August.

Typically less than 10% of first-year students and around 20% of second-year students split their summer between two employers. For information about the pros and cons of splitting the summer, consult CDO’s To Split or Not to Split, That is the Question advice. 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.

B. Suggested Timetables for Law Firm Job Search Activities

First Year Students

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>September/October</td>
<td>► Attend lectures, programs and events about law firm practice. (While CDO does not provide counseling to 1Ls until mid-October, 1Ls are invited and welcome to attend CDO-sponsored programs throughout the fall).&lt;br&gt;► Join a student organization or journal that will enable you to explore your career interests (e.g., Yale Entertainment and Sports Law Association, Yale Law and Business, Yale Forum on International Law, Yale Journal of International Law, Yale Journal of Health Policy, Law and Ethics).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Late October/November</td>
<td>► Attend CDO’s 1L Summer Job Search program and résumé and cover letter workshop.&lt;br&gt;► Draft résumé and then see your assigned CDO counselor to discuss career goals and review résumé.&lt;br&gt;► Begin habit of reading CDO’s weekly email to students.&lt;br&gt;► Conduct research into potential summer opportunities using CDO resources including the list of law firms who have hired first-year students in the past and the CDO Summer Employment Evaluations written by students.&lt;br&gt;► Create your list of desired employers.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>► Email cover letters and résumés on or after December 1 to larger law firms and to law firms in your hometown, especially if you plan on traveling home for the winter break.&lt;br&gt;► Attend CDO’s interviewing workshop and conduct a mock interview.&lt;br&gt;► Attend law firm holiday receptions over winter break.&lt;br&gt;► Consider enrolling in a clinic in the spring term to develop practical skills.&lt;br&gt;► Plan course selection to reflect and prepare for your employment interests (i.e., Antitrust, Bankruptcy, Business Organizations, Corporate Taxation, Property, Advanced Legal Writing, Financial Institutions and Capital Markets).</td>
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<tr>
<td>January/February</td>
<td>► Continue follow up with employers to whom you have applied.&lt;br&gt;► Apply to smaller law firms at this time. Consider applying to other sectors that may be appealing to you, including government and in-house.&lt;br&gt;► Participate in Spring Interview Program if interested in the law firms attending.&lt;br&gt;► Consider expanding your search to include additional firms and/or geographic areas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Month</td>
<td>Activities</td>
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<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>► Continue to follow up and apply to additional employers. Talk to a CDO counselor if you have any career questions or concerns about your job search.</td>
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<td>► Attend the Law Firm Practice Area Forum and other CDO events.</td>
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<tr>
<td>April/May</td>
<td>► Attend program on having a successful law firm summer experience.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>► Tell CDO about your employment plans!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June/July</td>
<td>► Read CDO’s summer emails containing important information about the Fall Interview Program and other career related events.</td>
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<td>► If possible, leave your summer position with a writing sample and one or more references in hand.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>► If in a geographic location where you wish to work next summer (and the location is remote from Yale), consider trying to set up informational interviews.</td>
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<td>► Use YLS Career Connections to network with alumni in your location in the legal field of interest to you.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>► Update résumé to reflect summer position and review with CDO counselor.</td>
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<td>► Attend summer law firm recruiting functions.</td>
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**Second Year Students**

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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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<tr>
<td>July/August</td>
<td>► Complete the <strong>Student Summer Employment Evaluation</strong> form online in CMS.</td>
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<td>► Speak with a CDO counselor to discuss career goals.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>► Research FIP employers, and bid on FIP employers of interest to you.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>► If not participating in FIP, or if supplementing FIP, research non-FIP firms and send résumés and cover letters.</td>
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<td>► Prepare for interviews by reading CDO’s interviewing advice, viewing CDO’s interview skills workshop, and conducting a mock interview.</td>
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<td>► Conduct interviews during FIP.</td>
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<td>► Attend law firm receptions and hospitality suites.</td>
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<td>► Attend CDO’s Turning a Callback Into an Offer program.</td>
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<td>► Conduct callback interviews.</td>
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<tr>
<td>September/</td>
<td>► Be aware of NALP’s Timing Guidelines, including that you should respond to offers from NALP firms <strong>within 28 days</strong> from the date of the offer letter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October/</td>
<td>► Attend law firm offer dinners and be sure to respond promptly to law firm invitations and/or outreach.</td>
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<tr>
<td>November</td>
<td>► Continue researching and contacting non-FIP firms.</td>
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<td>► Speak with a CDO counselor regarding job search progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>December</td>
<td>► Consider enrolling in a clinic to develop practical skills.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>► Plan course selection to reflect and prepare for your employment interests.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January/</td>
<td>► If no job offer, talk to a CDO counselor about strategies, including using YLS Career Connections to reach out to alumni.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February</td>
<td>► Attend CDO’s Law Firm Practice Area Forum and other programs even AFTER you have obtained a job—no job is forever!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March</td>
<td>► Attend program on having a successful law firm summer experience.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>► Respond to CDO’s request for information about your summer employment plans.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>► Learn about Bar Examination requirements online (<a href="http://www.ncbex.org">National Conference of Bar Examiners</a>) and by reading CDO’s <strong>Bar Admission advice</strong>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>► Tell CDO about your employment plans!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### June/July

- Read CDO summer emails containing important information about the Fall Interview Program and other career related events.
- If possible, leave your summer position with a writing sample and one or more references in hand (and an offer!).
- If in a geographic location where you wish to work next year consider trying to set up interviews/informational interviews.
- Use YLS Career Connections to network with alumni in your location in the legal field of interest to you.
- Update résumé to reflect summer position and review with CDO counselor.

### Third Year Students

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Month</th>
<th>Activities</th>
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| July        | ▶ Fill out the **Student Summer Employment Evaluation form online**.  
▶ Review list of employers interviewing 3Ls at FIP and bid                                                                                     |
| August      | ▶ Meet with a CDO counselor to discuss career goals.  
▶ If you receive a permanent offer from your summer law firm, take time to reflect on whether you wish to accept that offer.  
▶ Research non-FIP firms and send résumés and cover letters.  
▶ If interested, speak with a CDO counselor about strategies for reaching out to firms who offered you a summer position about permanent employment.  
▶ Refresh your interviewing skills by viewing the interview skills workshop program.  
▶ Conduct interviews during FIP and attend employer receptions. Conduct interviews outside of FIP.  
▶ If you have not done so already, learn about Bar Examination requirements online (National Conference of Bar Examiners: www.ncbex.org) and by reading CDO’s Bar Admission advice. |
| September/ October | ▶ Continue researching and contacting non-FIP firms.  
▶ Be aware of NALP’s **Timing Guidelines**. If, you received a permanent offer from a summer NALP employer by September 2, you must respond to that offer by **October 1**. If the offer was provided after September 2, you have 28 days to respond.  
▶ For NALP employers that did not previously employ you, you must accept an offer **within 28 days** of the offer letter or seek an extension. |
| November/ December | ▶ If no job offer through FIP, or if seeking employment outside of FIP, talk to a CDO counselor about strategies, including using YLS Career Connections to reach out to alumni and branching out to smaller firms in different cities. |
| January/ May  | ▶ Attend CDO’s Law Firm Practice Area Forum and send off event for 3Ls embarking on law firm practice.  
▶ Tell CDO about your employment plans!                                                                                                           |
CHAPTER 4
ALUMNI PERSPECTIVES

A. Practicing in the Northeast

BOIES SCHILLER FLEXNER, Partner, New York NY
PHILIP BOWMAN, J.D. 2001
Areas of Specialization: Sports Law, Securities Litigation, Antitrust, Banking and Finance Services, Global Investigations and White collar Defense, International Arbitration
84 Attorneys in Office; 300 Attorneys Total

When I graduated from law school I went to work for Cravath, Swaine & Moore in New York, expecting to be at a law firm for a couple of years at most before moving on to something else. I ended up liking working at a law firm much more than I expected to and when I looked up I realized four and a half years had passed. I decided it was time to make a change, so I moved to my current firm, Boies Schiller Flexner LLP, still not knowing where I was going but hoping the firm, less than ten years old at the time, would open up new pathways. I was immediately immersed in interesting and challenging work, and made partner about eighteen months later.

One of the things I like most about my firm is that young lawyers can both work on some of the biggest and most important cases (not always the same thing) while also having significant responsibility and opportunities to take on leading roles in cases. For me, this has meant almost always working on one or two big cases with more senior partners (typically the firm’s founders, who are still practicing) and at the same time working on one or two smaller cases where I get to be the “first chair.” This balance has been essential to my development as a lawyer. I have also worked on a great variety of different types of cases, from financial crisis era merger cases to cases involving yacht racing, recording contracts, and the construction of Yankee Stadium.

In addition, although the firm is now twenty years old and approaching 300 lawyers, it still has the feel of a start-up in many ways, and, because we are spread among several offices, the work environment still feels like a relatively small firm.

There is no question that the work can be demanding, particularly when cases go to trial. But those times are also the most rewarding professionally.

One of our founders, David Boies (also an alum) has said that he started the firm with three aspirations: to make money, to have fun, and to do some good. We don’t always achieve all three at the same time but it certainly can be achieved over the course of a career.

2017

ESOP PLUS, Partner, Rochester, NY
ROBERT BROWN, LL.B. 1970
Areas of Specialization: ESOPs and employee ownership
6 Attorneys

Our law firm is one of a handful of highly specialized national boutiques firms that practice in the middle market Employee Stock Ownership Plan (ESOP) arena. We advise our clients about matters related to business succession and exit planning in addition to ESOPs.
We have three offices in Columbus, OH, Rochester NY and West Hartford CT, and we have seven lawyers. Our partners have equal votes and equal compensation. All of our lawyers are well known as national ESOP advisors.

We guide corporate and individual clients, their attorneys and other trusted advisors through the use of employee ownership and other strategies to create exit plans, succession plans and incentive compensation systems. We also represent lenders and independent fiduciaries in ESOP transactions. Unlike many of our middle market competitors, we are an “ESOP Plus” firm that will point clients toward outright sales, private equity infusions, management buyouts or other exit tools if an ESOP is not appropriate.

Our typical transaction size ranges between $5 million and $50 million, but we have represented clients in $100 million, $500 Million and $1.1 billion transactions in the last few years. Our subject matter expertise draws on tax, M&A and employee benefits law. For over 30 years I was a member of the executive committee of the Tax Section of the New York State Bar Association. Our lawyers are also members of The ESOP Association, the National Center for Employee Ownership and the Alliance of Merger and Acquisition Advisors (Mid Market Alliance) and the American College of Employee Benefits Counsel.

The bulk of our employee ownership practice is driven by the demography of the baby boom, so we are somewhat less affected by cyclical economic trends than are other merger and acquisition specialists. Our positioning as a small, low overhead boutique with deep subject matter expertise and experience gives us a competitive advantage over traditionally organized law firms. There are only a few large firms, including Morgan Lewis and McDermott Will that compete effectively in our space. We have worked on a number of transactions with those firms. Our ESOP Plus practice is described more fully at: www.esopplus.com.

For me and for my colleagues, living in relatively small cities with a sophisticated practice has meant travel. It has also meant that local participation in civic and professional activities is important to the economic development of our firm. I have been fortunate to be able to serve on the boards of the local public radio station, the Rochester Philharmonic Orchestra and many other civic and social welfare organizations. I was chair of the Monroe County Democratic Committee and served eight years on the Rochester City School Board.

These opportunities for me and for our other lawyers have enabled us to have access to the financial, social and political circles that our local clients need. The size of our cities and the opportunity to make positive changes in the community also offer wonderful advantages to us individually by contributing to lifelong learning and continuous personal growth.

Stress in my life arises principally out of concern for whether I have done the best job for my clients. The relatively easy logistics of living in Rochester, West Hartford and Columbus allows our lawyers to juggle job, family, and other commitments with comparative ease. I spend 40 to 55 hours per week on matters related to our practice.

We earn an average partner compensation that is similar to that earned at other successful small firms in Western New York, central Connecticut and central Ohio. Our partner compensation is not high by absolute dollar comparison with the top compensation in New York or Washington, but it is comparable when adjusted for the relative cost of living. More importantly, we can preserve the lifestyle values that are important to us and to our families.

You owe it to yourself to consider smaller (I think Yale calls them “modest”) cities and a highly specialized boutique practice. You can be a big fish in a small pond, you can still participate in national
and international practice areas and you can live a more rounded life than your classmates who work 2,500 billable hours per year in New York, Washington or London without any reasonable guarantee of job security.

2017

DAVIS O’SULLIVAN & PRIEST LLC, New Haven, CT
LISA N. DAVIS, J.D. 1990
Areas of Specialization: Estates & Probate, Elder Law, Special Needs Trusts, and Nonprofit Organization Law
3 Attorneys

My life as a lawyer has included practice in the state’s largest firms, three years as a solo practitioner, and seven years in my own small firm. Davis O’Sullivan & Priest, was founded in 2009 with two congenial partners; we hoped to combine the fun and self-determination of solo practice with the support, collegiality and breadth of knowledge available in a firm. In addition to these varied experiences, I worked as secretary and paralegal in small firms prior to attending law school and as a law clerk during law school, as well as serving as a clerk to a Connecticut Supreme Court justice, David M. Shea. Altogether, I feel this gives me considerable perspective on the practice of law in Connecticut.

I describe my practice as “elder law and special needs, estate planning and probate, and nonprofit organization law.” That is, these are the areas I know most about and in which I seek new business. As soon as I “went out on my own,” I was quickly overwhelmed with business in the elder law and special needs areas, work which eluded me at larger firms and which some larger firms actively rejected; over the years, my practice in traditional wills and estate settlement has expanded. By contrast, it has been difficult to maintain a substantial practice in nonprofit organization law. In most cases, only large firms or specialists have a large number of nonprofit organizations able to pay attorneys’ fees. I have generally focused my efforts in this field on advocacy nonprofit clients and acting as a tax and corporate advisor to smaller or newer organizations. I was fortunate to work in the Yale Law School Nonprofit Organization Law clinic during all of these years, but sadly, that clinic has ended.

In what seems now like ages ago, when I was working in larger firms, I felt a slave to the billable hour—that hated dictator loathed by all associates. The irony is that when I became my own boss, I had to work even more hours than I did as an associate! The difference is self-determination. In the old days, to achieve the firm’s goal for associates of billing 1,800 hours, while still taking holidays and vacations, I had to bill about eight hours per day. However, the fields in which I am interested require a large investment of time to stay current, to develop contacts, to develop a reputation, and to attract new clients. There are people to take to lunch, email discussion groups in which to participate, journals to read, forms to design, and articles to write. As a result, I found that my workday was close to 12 hours a day, and I still fell short, and was acutely conscious of my failures and acutely anxious about what that might mean to my future. Since I left the “large” firms, my day may wind up as a 12-hour day, with even less vacation! There is a difference, however. I don’t work 12 hours because a boss demands that I reach a particular goal, but because the needs of clients can be overwhelming and because of the demands of being an entrepreneur who must meet a payroll and make sure the computers work. Now, my billables range from two to eight per day and I don’t bother with a monthly total. My eye is on the dollars that come through the door, not the time spent. And with lower overhead, I have the flexibility to charge what feels right—even when sometimes that means helping someone out by charging a nominal fee.

Having children greatly impacted my feelings towards my working life. When I was working in large law firms, my children were young. Although they had the care of my now ex-husband (then a stay-at-home dad), they ate lunch, came home from school, did their homework, and even had their dinners without me. I regret missing those moments of their lives. I tried to compensate by bringing them into the office on
weekends and spending all my free time with them. They enjoyed the chance to play in a different environment, to meet new people, and to discover a different city than the small one in which they lived. As they grew older, they didn’t need or miss me as much, and I like to think that they have appreciated having a mother who finds her job meaningful. This is, however, a difficult situation for any parent, and not to be taken lightly. On the bright side: now that my children are adults, I have been able to hire my children to work with me as office staff (when it suits them, that is!) and have discovered that the boss-employee relationship can sometimes be more cordial and relaxed than the sometimes stressful parent-child relationship. I’m aware that not all parents are lucky enough to have this opportunity.

What I never imagined, however, was how much my work would mean to me and teach me about the world. I’ve visited a 96-year-old in a nursing home who quoted Buddhist teachings from her bedside. I’ve consoled the loving husband and D-Day veteran whose wife of 50 years now requires round-the-clock care that will wipe out a lifetime of savings, unless I can help him get government assistance. I’ve been hugged by three old ladies when I “saved” the family homestead from a Medicaid lien. I’m honored and humbled to witness the unflinching sacrifice of clients caring for bedridden spouses day after day. I’ve learned about the unfair treatment in our society of those with mental illness and what a social worker actually does. I’ve learned about disease, and hospitals. I have enough stories to fill 100 novels that maybe I’ll write someday. I’ve also been able to dabble in the cool intellectual pleasures of tax law and Excel spreadsheets, as well as tasting the artistic pleasures of web design and PowerPoint. To some extent your job is what you make it. Once you get to the point when your field interests you enough that you voluntarily think about it on weekends, you have a career, not a job!

Last but not least: I’ve been able to choose a working environment I love. Almost every day I get to gaze out the big wood-framed windows at a breathtaking view of sky and the New Haven Green, in the city where I’ve worked for over thirty years. One day a week I work from home, away from telephones and interruptions, enjoying my garden and my cats. I like and appreciate each person I work with. These things can be as much or more important than the money you earn or even the particular field of law in which you practice. I cannot emphasize enough how important it is to like those around you and to feel comfortable in your surroundings, and to feel your judgment is trusted and respected. These are rare commodities in this day and age.

My experience as a solo and with my own small firm has taught me much. First, that it is a long, hard road to earn a reputation and a following! Second, the great thing about being a lawyer (at least in my field) is that ultimately it comes down to you and your own clients and therefore, there is nothing you “have to” accept if you choose not to do so. You have the luxury of being idiosyncratic—or principled—if you so desire and are willing to take a few risks. Third—society is not kind to small business and those going it alone. What you get signing on to a company may be unavailable to you as a solo. But there are usually tradeoffs between freedom and safety!

The popular saying these days in firms is that “after all, law is a business.” To me, the practice of law is only enjoyable as long as it is a profession first, and a business only second. The “business” is certainly necessary, so that you can pay the bills, both personal and office, and keep the work flowing in. That’s understood. But the drive to succeed, in and of itself, may not provide the necessary adrenalin to get through the days, weeks, months and years you will spend as a lawyer. An environment of affection and respect, and a field of law that is meaningful and interesting to you, can satisfy you as no amount of prestige and money can. Above all, my advice would be to spend time learning how to sense that you have found such an environment, and to know yourself well enough to recognize when you have found something that matters to you.

One final bit of pontification. Entering the solo trenches, I first saw the real evidence of “bad lawyers” and felt the bite of disapproval from regular folks who mistrust the entire profession as a result.
Sometimes it’s no fun being a member of what may be the second most hated profession. It is critical never to forget that the law is a profession and always to hold oneself to the high ethical standards that are the hallmark of a “profession.” If this distinction disappears and only the profit motive remains, then inevitably one can expect to hear more about greedy lawyers, untrustworthy lawyers, and even lawyers who steal. We owe it to each other to keep the law a profession we can be proud of.

DECHERT LLP, Former Partner, Princeton, NJ
ELLA DETRIZIO, J.D.
Areas of Specialization: Business/Corporate Law, Securities, and Venture Capital
10 Attorneys in office; Over 1,000 Attorneys Total

I graduated from the Yale Law School in 1984 and clerked for the first (and then only) female justice on the NJ Supreme Court from September 1984 through August 1985. While I found clerking to be a rewarding and enjoyable experience, my clerkship, coupled with my summer associate internships, convinced me that the life of a litigator was not for me. I just didn’t enjoy legal research and drafting pleadings. I joined a medium-sized suburban NJ law firm and did a smattering of non-litigation type work, but found corporate transactional work was personally most rewarding. In 1987, I joined Dechert Price & Rhoads, a large, international law firm (now Dechert LLP) in its newly-formed Princeton, NJ office, where I quickly learned the joys of working in a small office with big firm resources. Because Princeton and its environs was/is a hotbed of pharmaceutical companies and the biotechnology companies that they have spawned, life as a transactional lawyer in central-New Jersey was quite exciting and the work was cutting edge.

I eventually became a partner in Dechert’s Life Sciences Practice Group, which provides strategic legal services to a broad range of companies that include biotechnology and medical device companies in all stages of growth, as well as the incubators, investment banks, and venture capital firms that support them. Their group handles seed and venture financings, strategic alliances, mergers, acquisitions, initial public offerings, secondary offerings and 1934 Act compliance.

The most rewarding aspect of my work has also been the most challenging—that is, counseling and working with entrepreneurs and their emerging growth companies. The reason I have found this work to be so rewarding is because I feel that I have actually become a part of my client’s team. Very often, corporate transactional lawyers work on one-off transactions and then move on to the next transaction for the next company. And while they get to know the particular company pretty well during and for the purposes of that transaction, they do not develop relationships that transcend the transaction. Many of my past client relationships permit me to watch my clients grow from small companies with brilliant products in-the-making, to well-funded companies primed for an acquisition or initial public offering (or, alternatively, during down cycles, corporate dissolutions.) Watching companies that you help nurture and grow become successful and that view you as a critical participant in that success is very fulfilling indeed.
The challenge that accompanies these long-term relationships is that large firm fee structures are not always compatible with the representation of smaller companies in the short-term and there are pressures to eschew such companies for larger, more lucrative clients. In addition, while most entrepreneurs are very good at what they do (e.g., creating medical devices or drug compounds), they are often unsophisticated business people who require extraordinary patience and guidance from their corporate counsel. Overall, though, the experience of representing such entrepreneurs and their corporate offspring has been satisfying enough to keep me coming into the office for many years.

As you might discern from my narrative above, lawyers who do what I do on a daily basis need to have strong people skills, patience and common sense, and, because this profession is a service business, a strong work ethic. In order to substantively prepare for this career path, I recommend classes that would help you to develop a basic understanding of securities and tax laws and corporate finance.

After 27.5 years at Dechert, I recently transitioned my practice to a smaller, NY-based boutique firm, Reitler Kailas & Rosenblatt. As an attorney in RKR’s Princeton, NJ office, I will continue to work with venture-backed companies and with the investment funds that provide those companies their much-needed capital. RKR’s deep bench strength in working with these companies and investors will provide my clients with the legal resources they will need as they evolve over time. I am looking forward to this next chapter in my career.

2017

LATHAM & WATKINS, Managing Partner, New York, NY
MICHELE PENZER J.D. 1993
Areas of Specialization: Banking and Project Finance
374 Attorneys in Office; 2200+ Attorneys Total

I am a Latham & Watkins lifer—I started with the firm as a summer associate in 1992, joined as an associate in September, 1993 after graduating from Yale Law School that spring, and became a partner on January 1, 2001. As an associate, I took full advantage of the firm’s unassigned program. Though I was leaning towards doing transactional work when I came to the firm, I really had no idea what kind of transactional work I wanted to do. I tried a variety of matters during my first two years, and, at the end of my unassigned period, joined the project finance group. Had I been required to choose a practice group when I walked in the door I never would have chosen project finance—I didn’t even know what it was when I joined the firm. I credit Latham’s unassigned program with helping me to make an informed decision about my practice, and setting me down the path of a very fulfilling career. After I became a partner, a temporary dip in the project market and the dislocation of some of my clients caused me to look for new practice opportunities, and I transitioned to the banking practice. When that practice took off like a rocket ship in the mid-2000s there was no turning back, and I went on to serve as Global Co-Chair of the banking practice group from 2010 to 2015. Today, I continue to represent banks arranging acquisition financing and other types of leveraged financing across a broad range of industries.

Along the way, I have had the opportunity to serve the firm in a variety of other capacities as well. As an associate, I served on the firm’s Associates Committee for three years, and, after I became a partner, went on to chair the Associates Committee in 2010. The Associates Committee at Latham is a unique institution comprised of half partners and half associates that, among other things, recommends which associates will be promoted to the partnership each year. Each member of that committee has an equal vote, and I was honored to be entrusted with such an important responsibility at a very early stage in my career.
Latham has always had a clear partnership standard, which evaluates first chair skills, commitment, team play and business development skills in the context of asking whether any partnership candidate is capable of the sustained and substantial growth that we expect of our partners. From the minute I joined the firm, I was impressed by the fact that everyone would be evaluated in the same way, against the same set of criteria. I worked very hard as an associate, not so much for the sake of working hard or achieving any particular goal (I had not yet decided that I wanted to be a partner when I first joined the firm), but because I felt that there was an incredibly steep learning curve, and I was determined to get up that curve as quickly as possible. Frankly, I hated feeling like I had no idea what I was doing, and discovered very early on that the best remedy to that problem was to roll up my sleeves, dig in and learn as fast as possible, which also helped me to showcase my first chair skills, as well as my commitment and team play. Along the way, I was lucky to develop some great client relationships, and to be taught business development skills by some true masters of the craft. So, when I was up for partner in 2000, the firm was able to conclude that I should be promoted along with my class, despite the fact that I had taken six months off on maternity leaves along the way. To me, that was a true testament to the fact that I was being evaluated based on my skill set at the time and prospects for future growth, just like everyone else.

In 2005, I became the first woman elected to serve on the firm’s Executive Committee, and I served on the Executive Committee until 2009. I also have co-Chaired the firm’s Diversity Committee, have served as a member of the Pro Bono Committee and helped to establish Women Enriching Business, a group designed to help women both inside and outside of the firm develop networks and develop business. Today, I am the Managing Partner of Latham’s New York office, as well as the global partner leader of the Women Lawyer’s Group. These were, and continue to be, terrific experiences, as they have taught me a tremendous amount about the business of running a law firm, which, I have learned, is a very different skill set than the practice of law.

I have had several mentors during my time at the firm, who taught me everything I needed to know about being a lawyer. They also went out of their way to include me in their client relationships, bringing me along to client meetings, dinners, pitches and the like, and encouraging me to develop relationships with clients very early in my career. Watching them in action was a terrific experience—I learned so many of my legal and business development skills just by tagging along for the ride. My relationships with my mentors developed naturally—they were not assigned to mentor me, but they did so nonetheless, perhaps unwittingly sometimes.

Business development is an important part of the job for law firm partners, and though associates are not expected to bring in business, at Latham we encourage them to participate in the process so that they can learn this key skill set. There are many ways to develop business, from impressing clients with the quality of your work and commitment (which may be the single best way to develop business in my view), to helping clients find business (or employment) opportunities, to socializing with clients at dinners and ballgames. Find the method that works best for you and realize that you may be better at (or more comfortable with) certain types of business development than others. Fundamentally, it is important to do excellent work, of course. Beyond that though, it is important to try to develop relationships with clients, so that they are more inclined to call you, rather than the firm down the street. When attending events, it is always a good idea to force yourself to meet and talk to a few people you don’t know—if you spend the whole evening talking to your colleagues you’ve missed the opportunity to connect with potential clients.
I have two kids, currently ages 18 and 15. My son was born when I was an associate, my daughter when I was a partner. I have heard some people say over the years that it is better for a woman to wait to have kids until after she becomes a partner. I completely disagree with that. I firmly believe that a woman (or man) should have kids when she (or he) is ready to have kids. The rest will sort itself out. I personally found it much easier to return to work and reintegrate into firm life as an associate than I did as a partner. Each woman’s experience is personal and different though, and the decision as to when to have kids really can’t be generalized.

Balancing being a parent and being a lawyer is very much a juggling act, and I learned early on to take it one day at a time. I also learned not to fault myself for not being the “perfect” mom (whatever that means) or the “perfect” lawyer (whatever that means). Two somewhat imperfect personas can, in fact, create a fulfilled person. And showing both my daughter and my son that a woman can both be a good (if imperfect) mom and have a great career is fulfilling in and of itself.

Taking a somewhat long-(or at least medium-) term view of your career is helpful. If you expect that each day will be perfectly “balanced” you will no doubt be disappointed. But, if you look at your work and home lives over the course of weeks or months, rather than days, you are way more likely to be satisfied with the results. Flexibility is key. By virtue of working in a client service business, we are often at our clients’ beck and call. There will be days (and weeks, and even months) that are way too busy. Early in my career, I found myself incapable of enjoying the slower times—I always worried about where the next deal was going to come from. As I have become more senior, I have come to embrace and enjoy the downtime when it comes.

Developing good relationships with your supervisors and clients is also important. The better those relationships, the easier it will be to set realistic expectations—the client who knows that you are willing to do what it takes to get her work done in a crunch will be much more likely to give you leeway if she can. We all have commitments outside of the office. I have seen many school concerts, dance recitals and little league games in the middle of the day over the years—sometimes, I tell my clients where I am, sometimes, I tell them I am in a meeting, and sometimes, I am the crazy mom sitting in the bleachers on a conference call with a document in her lap. Whatever works, works, as long as I get there.

There is no one path to success, because there is no one definition of success. What you define as a successful career and the way you define happiness may in fact be very different than the way your law school classmates define those things. Don’t measure yourself against someone else’s definition of success, or happiness. Think about what is important to you, and then figure out how to achieve it. And pick a place to start your career that feels like a good fit for you. Ask yourself if you can see yourself practicing there, with the people you’ve met, for both the short and long term. If that takes you a big law firm, you will no doubt have a truly fulfilling, challenging (and busy!) career.

2017

SKADDEN ARPS SLATE MEAGER & FLOM LLP, Partner, New York, NY
REGINA OLSHAN, J.D. 1989
Areas of Specialization: Employee Benefits and Executive Compensation
888 Attorneys in office; Over 2,000 Attorneys Total

I am a partner at Skadden Arps in the Employee Benefits/Executive Compensation group. I arrived as a lateral associate and made partner three years later. My work particularly focuses on structuring executive compensation in M&A and other corporate transactions, as well as dealing with employee benefits issues that arise in such transactions. I work in New York City and live in Westport, CT with my husband and three children.
As to my job, the pace, hours and stress can be very intense when a big deal is being signed. Because deal work is cyclical, however, there are also “off” periods, as well as more “routine” work like negotiating employment agreements, structuring compensation arrangements, etc. I enjoy my specialty because it provides an opportunity for cutting edge work designing structures in the context of applicable tax, securities and corporate law. I also enjoy the personal contact with CEOs and others whom I tend to relate to on a more personal level than other corporate law attorneys. And certainly the work I do is very topical—often ending up on the front page of *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* or *Business Week* (not always in a flattering context of course.)

Many types of people can and do succeed in “Big Law” Yes, you have to be committed and prepared to work hard. You also have to enjoy (and not shy away from) intellectual challenge and a rather rough-and-tumble give-and-take atmosphere. It is also as close to a true meritocracy as I have seen, far more so than most of our corporate clients, for example. And the amount of responsibility placed on a young attorney is huge.

I think the worst aspects of big firm associate (and to some extent partner) life are the demanding hours which (particularly as an associate) are very largely outside your control. There are definitely Friday evenings that you may find out you are spending the weekend at the office. I must note that as a partner, this problem is less pressing because the associates will often do much of the “footwork” and drafting and you are in more (but far from total) control of your hours and your life. The best aspects of this job are the intellectual challenge, the fun and excitement of “doing deals,” the bright and interesting (yes, really!) people you work with, and the money which, as a partner, is handsome. I rarely (if ever) meet people whose jobs or lives I envy.

2017

**B. Practicing in the Mid-Atlantic**

**COHEN & GRIGSBY, Director, Labor & Employment Group, Pittsburgh, PA**

**MARIE RIVERA-JOHNSON, J.D. 2005**

*Areas of Specialization: Employment Law, Labor Law, Commercial Litigation*

*140 Attorneys*

After graduating from Yale Law School in 2005, I worked at Reed Smith, LLP as a litigation associate for a year before clerking for the Honorable Gary L. Lancaster in the U.S. District Court for the Western District of Pennsylvania.

Clerking for a district court judge was an incredibly useful behind-the-scenes look at litigation. As a clerk, I was able to view what sharp, experienced advocates were able to accomplish while gaining a good sense of what to avoid.

After my clerkship, I joined Cohen & Grigsby, P.C., a mid-size firm headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA. I wanted substantive litigation experience early in my career and felt that a more local firm with a stellar reputation like Cohen & Grigsby (approx. 140 attorneys) would allow me to have that experience sooner than an international place like Reed Smith (approx. 1,700 attorneys). Cohen & Grigsby prides itself in excellent work and client relations, while staffing cases leanly which allows young attorneys to learn and develop their skills at an earlier stage of their career.

Prior to working at Cohen & Grigsby, I assumed I would work for a firm for a couple of years but that I would need to move elsewhere for advancement and to make a positive difference. I was wrong on both counts. I became a Director at Cohen & Grigsby after six years at the firm. The firm was and is extremely
supportive of my career. The culture is one of respect and professionalism, and I work with a brilliant group of people who are more invested in collaborating to advance their client’s goals than competing internally.

I also found that I am able to influence organizations big and small throughout the region as an employment attorney. My practice consists primarily of employment litigation, but approximately 25% of my time is spent on client counseling. This means that I can advise companies on policies affecting disabled employees or how to properly manage employee medical leave. I ensure that organizations provide their management employees with proper education and training, so that they are treating their employees appropriately. Additionally, I work with employers to ensure they are compliant with all appropriate laws and regulations. In essence, I am able to have a stronger influence in ensuring that employees in the region have proper protections and treatment than I otherwise expected. There is more than one way to make a positive impact.

There are no typical days in my practice. I may spend weeks on end preparing for depositions and drafting summary judgment motions. Other times, I find myself drafting employment handbooks or policies, or visiting client locations to interview witnesses or train managers. I have found that my knowledge of employment law is useful to small non-profit organizations who do not otherwise have access to counsel. I have joined boards of civil rights organizations and a midwife center to assist them with employment-related matters on a pro bono basis.

Future practitioners should consider where they can have the biggest impact. I love working in a mid-size city. Early in my career, I was able to join boards of non-profits and was appointed to committees by judges in my district because the bar here is smaller than it is in other larger cities.

Finally, the advice that has stayed with me is that you need to work with people you like and respect. Working with high caliber people has always been important to me, but I also truly enjoy my colleagues and my workplace. I am able to work on recruitment and hiring, and mentor younger attorneys. Despite the stereotypes, there are plenty of firms where things like advancement and work-life balance are truly attainable. In my experience, life in private practice is certainly more than a billable hour.

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GUERRIERI, CLAYMAN, BARTOS, PARCELLI & ROMA, PC, Partner, Washington, DC

JEFFREY A. BARTOS, J.D. 1990

Areas of Specialization: Labor Law (Union-Side)
6 Attorneys

In my law school application essay back in 1987, I wrote somewhat naively that I hoped to practice labor law. At the time, I did not really understand what that practice involved, or how to make my way into it. I’ve been fortunate enough to end up working in this field for the past 24 years, all at the same small law firm.

I graduated from Yale in 1990. I had a great experience in the Yale Homelessness Clinic, and went to work at a Georgetown University Law Center clinical program immediately after law school. I supervised law students and had my own case load, mainly representing children who needed special education. I greatly enjoyed the representation, but also learned that I was not too interested in clinical education. After completing the Georgetown program, I received an offer from my current firm. I was also offered a job by a 30-lawyer litigation firm with a union-side labor practice, a number of other Yale Law School alumni, and “big firm” salaries. I went there. The other associates (and the pay) were great, I learned a lot about litigation, but the work quickly became tedious. I did no labor work and I simply didn’t care at
heart about what I was doing. In 1993, that firm began to split up. Having learned my lesson, I contacted my current firm and asked if they would still take me. Thankfully, they did.

I took a 50% pay cut and was delighted to do it. The firm had 14 lawyers, and specialized in representing unions in the airline and rail industries. These industries have their own labor law (the Railway Labor Act) and are not within the NLRB’s jurisdiction, so the work was primarily litigation. The firm split more or less in half a few years later, and I was made a partner shortly thereafter.

Our practice has evolved over time. We still specialize in Railway Labor Act representation. It’s a relatively small and pretty collegial field on both sides of the fence, so after a while you know and are known by most of the practitioners. We also advise and represent unions under the Labor Management Reporting and Disclosure Act, which governs internal union political processes and the fiduciary duties of union officers, among other things. I have also developed a plaintiffs’ antitrust and consumer protection practice.

I particularly enjoy the variety of our labor cases. I have defended many of our clients against suits by employers alleging that an illegal strike, “sick out” or slowdown has occurred; and have frequently sued employers to prevent the contracting out of work. I have represented one union in a suit by another union in a “raid.” I frequently defend union decision-makers in cases challenging collective bargaining agreement terms or the handling of grievances and arbitrations. I represent individual employees who have been terminated for union activity. I represented a locally-famous disc jockey who was fired for on-air remarks and then sued by his employer for damages. I have helped plan for hundreds of internal union elections, and have helped resolve disputes arising out of those elections. I have also had the chance to train local union officers in how to run union elections in compliance with federal law.

The common thread in all that work is that, in nearly every instance, we are assisting workers directly or else strengthening the organizations which represent them. This, either directly or indirectly, provides tangible economic benefits to working people, a cause I am proud to be a part of.

I also enjoy dealing with the people who are involved in the labor movement. I am grateful to have the opportunity to work with and for people from all walks of life who are motivated by the goal of improving the lot of workers and fighting back against employer greed and overreaching. They are also much more fun than most corporate types.

In addition, the hours are pretty good. The needs of our clients do fluctuate, and litigation has its demands, but on the whole the work has proven very manageable. Our firm’s economy does not demand that everyone work weekends, or that vacations should be foregone. This is one aspect of small firm life that should not be overlooked. By the same token, of course, the pay is also well below large firm rates.

One aspect of the practice that I did not anticipate is the responsibility attendant on being a co-owner of a small business, our law firm. This brings with it involvement in all sorts “non-legal” and “non-labor” activities, such as lease negotiations, management of capital expenditures and 401(k) plan offerings, and so on. It also carries an obligation to our employees to run a successful business. On the whole, it’s not too onerous, but it is certainly not something I planned for or learned about in law school.

On the union side of labor law, most legal work is either performed by unions in-house, or by small firms. Because the law firms in this field are generally small, job vacancies are unpredictable and not very well publicized. There are some, but not many, summer associate positions at firms, although many international unions have summer positions or school-year internships. Many firms look to hire associates who have had a clerkship or have worked for a year or two, rather than hire directly out of law school. If you are looking for work in this field, it pays to network as much as possible. I have had many meetings
with law students or recent graduates to help them understand the nature of the work and the firms which might be hiring at any given moment, and am always happy to do that. Job listings are also available through the AFL-CIO, which has a “Lawyers Coordinating Committee.”

2017

C. Practicing in the South

FISHER, BENDECK & POTTER, PL, Partner, West Palm Beach, FL
ZACHARY POTTER, J.D. 2001
Areas of Specialization: Family Law, Appellate, and Corporate Litigation
3 Attorneys

When I graduated from Yale in 2001, I didn’t know exactly what type of work I would do, although there was one thing I was fairly certain of—it would not be family/matrimonial law. Sixteen years later, I am a partner at a boutique family law firm in West Palm Beach, Florida (Fisher, Bendeck, & Potter, PL) and I could not be happier with the career choices that brought me here.

My initial misperception about being a family lawyer was based upon the fact that I did not understand how challenging, fast-paced, and impactful significant family law cases can be. I thought that family cases were about emotions and lose-lose scenarios involving children with warring parents, but that is not what we do. In fact, we usually turn down cases where the disputes primarily relate to children.

With some exceptions (depending upon the circumstances), we generally only accept cases where the dispute relates to $50 million or more. More important than the amount in dispute, however, is the nature of the dispute. We tend to be brought into a special kind of case, which is more akin to a giant fraud case than it is to a typical divorce. In that regard, the lessons that we learned in class about “family law” have little to do with the actual, day-to-day work that we do. Practically speaking, my daily work is much more informed by the classes that I took in international law, constitutional law, evidence, federal taxation, accounting, trusts and estates, contracts, and even criminal law. The best description of what we do can be found in a New York Times Magazine story that followed one of our cases from start to finish, which was titled, “How To Hide $400 Million.” As the article describes, to unwind a fraud and to repatriate hidden, overseas money, we frequently litigate the constitutional limits of jurisdiction, the crime/fraud exception to the attorney-client privilege, piercing of the corporate veil, and related topics.

When we are not litigating hidden-money cases, we are typically brought into matters that involve valuable, closely-held businesses that, somehow, need to be equitably divided, but where the solutions for doing so are limited and complex. As an example, someone might tell the divorce court that a marital business is worth $20 million while, simultaneously, telling his or her business partners that it worth $200 million. The resolution of the valuation dispute, in such circumstances, is the entire case. The fact that there will be a 50/50 division is just the backdrop to a much more important factual and legal battle over the size of the marital estate in the first instance. While the “valuation” fight is occurring, there are often other civil cases that are filed and/or corporate actions that are taken to gain advantage and control of the assets in dispute. In that regard, the cases are not unlike corporate litigation involving partners or shareholders of a company.
Finally, once a case like those described above are resolved by settlement or otherwise, the next stage typically involves highly complex corporate transactions, secured promissory notes, estate planning documents, etc. We will usually have a team of lawyers (from other firms), accountants, and other professionals assist us at this stage, although, in most instances, we quarterback the process, much like the general counsel would do under similar circumstances.

Overall, I would say that the application of traditional “family law,” i.e., the statutes or rules that specifically govern divorces, is a relatively small part of our practice. I have cases pending around the country and the world right now that initially arose from a dispute between spouses, but have not involved the application of family law in years.

From a work-life balance perspective, working at a boutique firm without a large team can be taxing. We work late and on the weekends because, if we do not do the work ourselves, there is no one to cover for us. However, as the owners of the firm, we are also able to control our work flow in a way that is different from when I was at a large law firm. If we need a break, we can turn down new cases for a while. Also, I would point out that, in my experience, our local judges are very respectful of pre-planned vacations. For that reason, I make up for the long hours by taking two long vacations per year for about a month of vacation every year. In terms of compensation, we are fortunate to earn what a successful partner at a big firm in New York City would make.

In terms of my early career path, I started by clerking for a federal appellate judge on the Second Circuit in New York. After that, I had a three-year fellowship to do pro bono work for Holland & Knight. In exchange for the fellowship, I promised to work in the firm’s corporate litigation group for at least an equivalent number of years. I stayed with Holland & Knight until I became a partner. I enjoyed my time at Holland & Knight and was lucky to have excellent mentors throughout my 9-year tenure at the firm. I have been with my current firm for six years.

2017

LAWRENCE & BUNDY LLC, Partner, Atlanta, GA
ALLEGRA J. LAWRENCE-HARDY, J.D. 1996
Areas of Specialization: Class Action Defense; Complex Business Litigation; Insurance; Internal Investigations; Labor & Employment; Litigation; Education, Government & Civil Rights; Crisis Management; Telephone Consumer Protection Act (TCPA)
10 Attorneys

If you’re a person who can see the big picture, who enjoys turning over a problem and analyzing all sides of an argument, who enjoys standing up for what’s right and being in constant motion, then you might be a litigator.

That’s what I do each day as a litigator at a national law firm and I assure you that “typical day” has never been part of my vocabulary. On any given day, I meet with clients, sometimes to discuss a specific matter, but often just to gain a better understanding of their business. There are conference calls with other attorneys and clients, depositions, stand-up court appearances, and firm management and strategy meetings. Several evenings a week find me having dinner with clients. Because my practice is a national one, I spend a lot of time in airports and hotels, traveling most weeks of the year.

All this activity is focused on one goal—solving our clients’ most complex problems.

Here are a few things to consider as you take stock of whether litigation is for you.
You don’t have to be an extrovert, but you must be a team player.
Do you like working in a team? Litigators cannot work alone. As a senior litigator, part of my job is to select and bring together a team of attorneys who have the legal talent as well as the soft skills that can move us to a win. As a younger attorney, it’s essential for you to have both the intellectual capacity as well as the emotional intelligence that it takes to work in a group setting with other attorneys and business professionals. Be assured, those groups will be packed with big egos. You’ll need the confidence and skills to be both assertive and collaborative at the same time.

You don’t have to be an extrovert, but you must develop confidence. The entertainment industry and news media might lead you to believe that every litigator is a charismatic extrovert. Certainly, a big personality isn’t going to hurt you, but I know plenty of successful litigators who don’t fill the room with their presence. They’re effective leaders because they have the confidence that comes from preparation and knowledge. Experience calms any jitters they might have about standing up in court or leading meetings.

Preparation and listening are the keys to success.
I happen to be an extrovert, but my effectiveness as a litigator comes from my commitment to helping clients and the many hours I invest in preparation and team building. And although I enjoy talking, I’ve also learned that listening is a more valuable skill. The ability to read people is a competitive advantage, and the importance of listening and watching are often underrated. There is plenty of room for the confident introvert in litigation.

Time management is essential.
You must also become an expert in time management. The law—especially litigation—is demanding. There’s no sugarcoating it—big firm or small firm, you will work long, sleep-depriving hours. The deadlines are relentless and there’s always someone—a client, a colleague—who needs your counsel after hours or on the weekend. If this is the life you’ve chosen, you have to commit to learning time management and setting personal priorities. I have to be extremely organized to find time to be the wife and mother I want to be. In our family, we believe that no success outside of the home will compensate for failure in the home. That takes work.

Take advantage of all that Yale offers.
As a student at the Yale Law School, you’re enormously privileged to learn from some of the best legal minds in the world. Be sure you get all you can from courses on evidence, federal procedure and all of the black letter law courses, as well as some of the excellent clinics the Law School sponsors. But Yale offers a lot more. One of the best courses I took at Yale was “The Book of Job and Justice.” While the course didn’t teach me any hard rules, it taught me a great deal about the power of the law to shape our society. Don’t miss opportunities that develop your intellect, broaden your horizons, and develop your perspective.

While litigation can sometimes unfortunately be combative, the goal is to utilize the legal system to resolve problems and find solutions. It will make you think creatively each day, constantly test your ability to react to changing circumstances and give you the satisfaction of helping clients who face challenges. If you find that appealing, you might be a litigator.

2017
When I told my classmates that I was moving to Alabama to practice law, their reaction typically went like this: “Well, it’s so nice that you are going to help the less fortunate.” They were shocked to learn that, in fact, Alabama has private law firms in real, honest-to-God buildings.

On my first day at the firm, though, the sophistication wasn’t evident. My two senior partners had split off from the largest firm in town to form a two-man operation. From 900 square feet in a downtown Birmingham office building, they were defending a Fortune 100 company against class actions around the nation. There were only two offices in that space, and, as the new guy, my first desk was in the reception area. From that desk, I helped draft a brief to the U.S. Court of Appeals from the Ninth Circuit that resulted in the reversal of a $68 million judgment.

Eventually, we moved into more appropriate space, and, in the fifteen years since, we have grown into a dozen-lawyer litigation boutique involved in virtually every high-profile case in Alabama and some of the most complex litigation in the country. Most of our work has been on behalf of business clients, but we have also assisted with the prosecution of corrupt politicians and have pursued plaintiffs’ cases, including one that resulted in a $68 million jury verdict in federal court. Along the way, we have garnered awards and recognition, but, most importantly, we have had a lot of fun.

Alabama isn’t for everyone, but, in choosing where to practice law, I would encourage you to take a broader perspective. There are plenty of good lawyers in DC and New York and San Francisco. There are far fewer in places like Boise and Kansas City and Birmingham. Take a chance. Try something different. You might be surprised by how much you love it.

I am a corporate and securities lawyer at Wyche, PA., a 34-person law firm located on the banks of the Reedy River in Greenville, SC. I chose my law firm because of my experience at YLS. During law school I was fortunate to work on the Notes Topics Committee of The Yale Law Journal and in other volunteer projects with brilliant, interesting, dedicated, generous and witty fellow students. When I began to consider law firms, my goal was to replicate that peer experience as much as possible. I believe that I have succeeded. My firm offers a wonderful combination of complex and interesting work, an ideal setting, and truly brilliant, interesting, dedicated, generous and witty colleagues.

Two other things convinced me to join my firm. First was the values demonstrated by attorneys in the firm. We have a tradition of hiring with a view toward the long term, bringing aboard only attorneys we believe are capable of being admitted to membership. Our firm also values service to the community and has a long tradition of community leadership. In addition, during my interviews, I was impressed with the understatement demonstrated by my now-colleagues. One senior lawyer, also a Yalie, drove me around during my interview in his 10-year-old car. During my clerkship, another Yalie, also a senior lawyer with the firm, tooled me around town in his 1970’s wood-sided station wagon. During this time, I was considering other firms where luxury cars were standard issue among partners. I found it refreshing to be...
in a firm where attorneys did not feel the need to show off. I should note that lawyers in our firm do have our share of nice cars, but I enjoy practicing in a place where people feel comfortable putting their money quietly to work, rather than in expensive cars.

The second consideration was the location. I wanted to spend my days overlooking a waterfall, not a parking garage. For twenty-eight years now, my office has had a view of the Reedy River.

My career path has been somewhat unusual for a Yale Law School graduate as I am still with the firm at which I began my career. After a one-year clerkship on the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, I joined my firm as an associate and achieved membership in 1994. Our practice is vibrant and varied. I’ve first-chaired registration of over a billion dollars of securities, helped close a variety of cross-border M&A transactions, and addressed a wide range of corporate governance issues. After the birth of our first child, (we now have three) I decided to be a part-time member. My firm was fully supportive of this decision and tried everything in its power to make this work. But I found that, like many other part-time lawyers, as long as I was a primary client contact, part-time was illusory because I would work night and day to meet the inevitably tight deadlines. Only after I decided to go “of-counsel” (and relinquish much primary client contact) have I been able to achieve the flexibility I sought. This is made possible by wonderfully supportive colleagues, a team approach, and remote access to our office computer system.

CDO asked that I comment on whether I had experienced any surprises or things that I wish that I had known as a student. In law school I focused on doing well academically and viewed as a side benefit the relationships I formed (and now treasure). I have since realized that the less-readily measured interpersonal skills are far more important than academic records in building a practice. Clients come to you with problems and projects that are very important to them. No matter how clever your solution and how quick your response, they need to know that you genuinely care about the project and them. Clients come and stay because of the relationships that they develop with lawyers in our firm. We value our clients as people who are working with us to make our community stronger. Over the years that I have been in Greenville, it has transformed into a world-class city that regularly wins national and international “best of” lists. Lawyers in our firm, working with clients, colleagues and other community leaders, have been a large part of that transformation. We are enthusiastic about the future of our city and our firm. In April, our firm launched a new initiative “Storytellers,” to invite our clients and friends to engage with us on ideas and events outside the law with a goal of sparking transformative conversations. Visitors to wyche.com/storytellers can visit the site to explore books, videos, and articles recommended by Wyche attorneys. Storytellers also includes an event component in which Wyche creates a forum to encourage new connections and live discussions of topics that encourage examination of the world from unique points of view.

Relationships within a firm are also very important. I am proud to say that I genuinely call my colleagues friends. Our firm has weekly breakfast meetings in which all attorneys are invited to participate. Wyche values mentorship at every level, both formal and informal, and has many programs in place to ensure that associates have the support and encouragement they need to be successful. Our associates participate in frequent training programs that advance their personal and professional development. The Associate Book Club has become a long-standing tradition and a place where associates can discuss new ideas based on thought-provoking books and TED Talks. Several attorneys share hobbies. Staff and attorneys gather as a firm once a month to celebrate birthdays, and anniversaries with the firm, baby showers, and other life events. We have a firm-wide newsletter distributed once a week featuring accomplishments and life events of our team. The newsletter regularly includes a Family Edition that features news of staff and attorney children and grandchildren. Other activities at the firm that promote relationships include the Women of Wyche (WoW), an affinity group that promotes mentorship, professional development, and business development for our women attorneys. The group meets monthly to discuss each of these topics and to support one another professionally and personally. Our firm also sponsors the Forum, a group of
both attorneys and staff at Wyche who are committed to generating ideas for new ways to support Wyche’s unique culture through initiatives that continue to make the firm a great place to work. Our firm also actively encourages healthy life habits, and it’s not unusual to see attorneys or staff whipping up a smoothie in our Vitamix in the kitchen or heading out the side door for biking, yoga, walking or running.

When I joined the firm, one of the senior members told me that he was looking forward to growing old with me. He sincerely meant it and I absolutely enjoyed the twenty years we spent together. In our recruiting, we look for people who value relationships, who work well with others and with whom we believe we will enjoy working. Approaching a job as a life-long opportunity makes it more important than ever to let the little things go and look for ways to foster connections. We have a true team culture in which we celebrate one another’s successes and look for ways to support one other. Every one of my colleagues is involved in community service. With the full support of my firm I have chaired the local legal services agency, served on the local United Way campaign cabinet, served as legal counsel to the local performing arts center, served as President of the county bar association, chaired an economic development board, served as president of an arts organization, chaired a community foundation board, served as co-chair of the state-wide Liberty Fellowship Economic Development Forum, hosted and produced a local access cable program providing information about legal topics to members of the low-income community, lectured to non-profits, and founded a website outdoorosity.org (Facebook: https://www.facebook.com/outdoorosity), providing inspiration and information to encourage people to spend more time outdoors. I am also working to help revitalize an old mill village, the Village of West Greenville, into a vibrant arts district. Inspired by the way that Yale has helped revitalize New Haven, I have worked with my colleagues to develop a set of “Community Friendly Business” lease terms for a property in which I am a shareholder. Our goal is to help sponsor free job training and to encourage businesses within our development to engage with the existing community, hire low-income residents, provide a product offering including affordable goods so that local residents can feel welcome in the store, and maintain welcoming store-fronts with fresh, seasonal greenery. We will provide these lease terms as a free model for other businesses to emulate. I have also been active in our church and our children’s schools. It is a full but satisfying plate.

Henry Parr, one of my colleagues, remarked in an article recognizing him for the “Super Lawyers South Carolina” listing that he chose Wyche because he knew that “you will become like those around you.” I believe that is true and I am very glad that I chose Wyche. My colleagues in the Greenville County Bar Association recently awarded me the Tommy Thomason Award which honors an attorney who best exemplifies compassion, integrity, strong personal values, dedication to the community, humility, and diplomacy. The award celebrates those who are admired by peers, dedicated to improving the legal system, and committed to resolving disputes in a way that minimizes conflict. This award reflects the qualities of the attorneys with whom I work, and who have mentored and encouraged me. In addition to complex and interesting legal work and substantial pro bono legal activities, attorneys in our firm have been able to carve out time to lead interesting lives and pursue community passions. The lawyer for whose family our firm is named published a hiking guide and six books of nature photography, another lawyer sings in a chorale group, another writes fiction and plays the bassoon in a local orchestra, another plays the flute and one performs in a rock band. Almost all of my colleagues enjoy the outdoors and hikes and rafting trips are regularly available. As for me, in addition to founding Outdoorosity.org, I am an avid gardener, outdoor adventurer, and photographer. My novel, Smack Dab in the Middle of Maybe, is set for release from Random House Children’s Books in July 2018. The book combines outdoor survival with an art history mystery, and is set in a historic ghost town based on my hometown in rural Mississippi. As research for my novel, I did extensive training in outdoor survival and studied art history and poetry. Each of my colleagues has encouraged me in my writing journey and I am now at work on my next novel.
I am convinced that I would not have the varied interests—or the time to devote to them—in another setting. So Greenville and the Wyche law firm have absolutely been the right decision for me. My wish for you is that you find yourself as well-satisfied with your choices 29 years out of law school.

2017

D. Practicing in the Midwest

GOLDBERG KOHN, Associate, Chicago, IL
STEPHANIE JACOBS LUGER, J.D. 2008
Areas of Specialization: Banking/Finance, Business/Corporate Law, Real Estate
85 Attorneys

I have been working as an associate in the corporate group at Goldberg Kohn, a midsize Chicago law firm, for five years. I came to Goldberg after working as an associate in Sidley Austin’s Chicago office for almost two years in their insurance and financial services group. While both positions were transactional in nature, my experience at Goldberg Kohn has been quite different from that at Sidley Austin. Both have been incredibly positive experiences.

I don’t believe that one can really generalize about the “culture” of Sidley Austin. Particularly in the Chicago office, there are so many different groups and each group tends to have its own “culture.” The insurance and financial services group was relatively laid back, especially for a large law firm. The associates and partners I worked with were friendly and sociable and generally very fun to be around. My colleagues at Sidley were also very hard working and definitely put in the long hours. I think that there are ups and downs in work flow in any transactional practice (especially given the changes in the economy in recent years) and I certainly experienced some extreme highs and lows with respect to work flow during my time at Sidley. Nevertheless, despite the frustration of unpredictable and often long hours, the work I did at Sidley was challenging and I often found it quite interesting.

The type of work that I did during my time at Sidley was transactional and was mainly focused on large insurance and reinsurance industry players. I worked on mergers and acquisitions and corporate governance matters for such companies and spent a good amount of time researching and analyzing insurance laws for our clients. Despite being a very junior associate, I did have some direct client contact and I know that as associates in my group became more senior, their interactions with clients as well as their responsibilities were increased.

The reason I decided to switch to a smaller firm was because I wanted to broaden my practice to more general corporate matters and to work with a variety of clients beyond the insurance and reinsurance arena. I also felt that I might prefer the more intimate setting of a smaller firm.

My experience at Goldberg Kohn has exceeded my expectations. The culture is very unique for a law firm. The size of the firm enables all associates, partners and staff to know one another. Everyone I work with is friendly and sociable, and I really feel that people here take an interest in getting to know each other on more than just a superficial or work-related level. The associates and partners that I work with are extremely intelligent and are very hard working. They also respect their own lives outside the firm as well as the lives of the other associates and partners that they work with. With respect to hours, I think that it varies from practice to practice and from group to group. As with any transactional practice, my hours are often unpredictable. However, I have not found the highs and lows in work flow to be very severe and I find that I have a greater degree of control over my schedule here in comparison to my experience at a larger firm.
It is hard to describe a typical day, as each day is different from the next. I am typically working on several different deals at once. I may spend a few hours reviewing documents, a few hours drafting or revising agreements (perhaps for the same deal or perhaps for different deals), thirty minutes on the phone with a client and another hour in a meeting with a colleague. My next day may be entirely focused on reviewing documents and the following day I may be running from meeting to meeting and call to call. It all just depends on which deals I am working on and which phase of the deal I am at (as is true with most corporate attorneys, as a closing nears, things get busier and busier). The clients that I work with are as varied as the work I may do in a day. In the four years that I’ve been with the firm, the clients I’ve worked with have included, among others, technology, financial, investment, media, publishing, food, drink, insurance, sporting goods, healthcare and medical supply companies. I have truly enjoyed the variety of types of clients I’ve been exposed to as well as the increased amount of interaction I’ve had with such clients. Most deals that I work on are staffed very leanly, and I spend a lot of time speaking directly with clients. I think that having the opportunity to communicate directly with clients as a junior associate is a function of the size of the firm as well as the types of clients that my group deals with (mostly small to medium size companies).

HINSHAW & CLUBERTSON, Partner, Appleton WI
LORA ZIMMER, J.D. 2003
Areas of Specialization: Health Law
8 Attorney Office, 525 Attorneys Total

I am a partner at Hinshaw & Culbertson LLP in the Health Law Practice Group. I am also the partner in charge of the Appleton, Wisconsin, office of the firm. Much of my work is as outside general counsel for health care clients, assisting with their everyday legal needs in the areas of contract review, regulatory compliance, transactions, and other matters. I also have a growing practice in Title IX, assisting educational institutions with the proper investigation and handling of sexual misconduct and discrimination claims.

I enjoy living and working in the Appleton area, where I grew up and where my husband and I are close to family. It is a great place to raise our two daughters and enjoy a high quality of life with a low cost of living. It is rare to find a large law firm like Hinshaw in a city the size of Appleton, so I am grateful to have the “best of both worlds,” as it were—the resources of a large firm and a good salary in a place where it goes far. I encourage law students to give careful thought to the location of the job opportunities they are considering, and whether those locations will be good fits for them personally.

Having started at Hinshaw as a young associate, I have also had the opportunity to shape my career in the way I wanted, developing areas of practice that matched my interests. Of course, when working at a law firm, the opportunities to develop areas of practice are dependent upon your ability to bring in clients in those fields. Marketing is therefore always a significant component of working at a law firm, particularly if you have the desire to advance within the firm.

Finally, it is very important to me to work in an office where people are respectful of one another and work well together. I am very fortunate to be working in an office and a firm where this is part of the culture. I encourage students weighing various job opportunities to look carefully at how well the attorneys and staff seem to get along—working in any legal career can be stressful, and the culture of the office can make all the difference on whether that stress is manageable at the end of the day.
I am a partner at Kirkland & Ellis LLP where my practice consists primarily of advising private equity firms in acquisitions and divestitures. I attended Yale Law School and Yale School of Management and did my undergraduate studies at Northwestern University. I spent the first portion of my career at K&E in Chicago. In early 2014 I moved to Houston, Texas to co-found the firm’s twelfth office, which is now well over 100 attorneys. I moved to our growing San Francisco office in mid-2016, where I have helped grow the practice to over 130 attorneys.

Like many law students, I had reservations about actually practicing law, in part, due to the fact that the attorneys I had exposure to viewed law and business as distinct career paths. I have always viewed the practice of law as a business and the role of a lawyer, particularly a PE/M&A lawyer, as that of a business advisor. I ultimately settled on K&E because the people I met there understood this.

In choosing a law firm, the single most important (and admittedly difficult) factor for law students to consider is fit. While many big law firms have much in common, there are meaningful distinctions worth examining. I chose K&E for a number of reasons, including its entrepreneurial culture, propensity to reward performance with above market compensation, reputation among its peers and impressive client base. Becoming a trusted advisor will require a significant time commitment. Be sure the law firm you choose has a culture that recognizes and rewards such commitment as much as it respects the time you carve out for family, friends and personal development.

While it is undeniably true that deal work is rarely nine to five and is often hectic and stressful, it is also challenging, exciting and personally and professionally rewarding. Being a good deal lawyer does not mean being the smartest person in the room. It requires judgment, creativity, perspective and certain soft skills like being able to build a team, connect with your client and partner with opposing counsel.

K&E clients have come to expect that their lawyers understand the issues they care about and, more importantly, that this understanding informs the advice given and judgment exercised by their counsel. Having a background or experience in (or at least some familiarity with) corporate finance, economics, accounting and tax is incredibly helpful and will flatten the learning curve; however, the primary learning happens on the job and nothing is a substitute for experience—the more deals you see, the more valuable you become.

If you are heading into big law I strongly encourage you to stretch and challenge yourself. Ask for more responsibility than you think you can handle and develop judgment by exercising it. Remember that the greatest learning occurs when you venture out of your comfort zone. As for the inevitable long hours, think of them as credits in the bank to be spent later when you cash in on your experience.

2017
E. Practicing out West

ALLEN VELLONE WOLF HELFRICH & FACTOR, Partner/Shareholder, Denver CO
JORDAN FACTOR, J.D. 2004
Areas of Specialization: General Commercial Litigation in Various Industries
15 Attorneys

I am a partner at Allen Vellone Wolf Helfrich & Factor, PC in Denver, CO. I have been very fortunate in my career to avoid specialization while still handling challenging and complex matters. I practice general commercial litigation across a range of industries—including energy, software technology, agriculture, finance, and construction—in a variety of forums—state court, federal court, bankruptcy court, probate court, arbitration forums, and administrative bodies—and involving a broad set of issues—including securities laws, fiduciary duties, employment law, consumer protection, commercial agreements, and intellectual property rights. I also have handled dozens of appeals, many raising issues that I don’t handle as a trial lawyer, such as criminal convictions and sentencing, and have represented plaintiffs in a variety of civil rights cases. A significant part of my practice recently has involved representing cannabis companies in all aspects of their business, including a host of different transactions.

I attribute the breadth of my practice to my decision to work at small firms. Following my clerkship on the 10th Circuit, my top priority was to take a law firm job that provided me immediately with a significant amount of responsibility. Only smaller firms were willing to do so. Within one week of being admitted to the bar, I argued my first appeal. In my first year as a lawyer, I took or defended over three dozen depositions. Working at a small firm accelerated my professional development. It also allowed me to grow a practice across a range of industries. I did not need to differentiate myself from hundreds of other attorneys at my firm by specializing in a narrow area.

I am now one of four partners in a fifteen-lawyer firm. Owning and running a small business has given me invaluable insight into the pressures and issues that my clients confront. It has also allowed me to shape my firm’s culture and help create a place where I love going to work.

2017

COPPERSMITH BROCKELMAN PLC, Partner, Phoenix, AZ
SAM COPPERSMITH, J.D. 1982
Areas of Specialization: Transactional Law, Real Estate & Land Use, Business Organizations, Nonprofit Governance
20 Attorneys

The most important choice I made after graduating law school wasn’t the one I worried most about. What was most significant wasn’t my initial job, but rather where I went for my clerkship. While a law student, I worried a lot about types of employers, sizes of firms, and different types and styles of practices (whatever I thought that meant), but what actually affected my future the most is where I went after graduation. For me, geography was destiny.

Once I made that first choice of place, I found I had more flexibility regarding types of employers than with new locations, and you may as well. Even if you’re just starting out, the longer you stay, the more you belong to the community. Eventually, a relationship, community activities, business ties, children, or even inertia will keep you where you are, and you get too old (or at least feel too old) to want to take another bar exam.

That was my experience, anyway. I originally came to Phoenix for a one-year clerkship, not intending to stay, but I never left. I even took the California Bar exam the summer before my clerkship started, which
is not something one does lightly. Despite arriving on a 114° day and having a federal circuit court clerkship that had almost nothing to do with the local legal community, I wound up committing to Phoenix after only 6 months. I knew I didn’t want to be in a huge firm back east, but I didn’t really expect to stay here. But once I came to Phoenix, I never left.

After my clerkship, I spent a couple of weeks working on a friend’s mayoral campaign and after his upset victory, served as his assistant. When that stint ended, I commenced work in a 20-lawyer firm that by Phoenix standards in those days was considered medium-sized. I then spent two years at a 6-lawyer spin-off from a larger Phoenix firm, and then moved to a 14-lawyer firm. I left that firm after four years to run for Congress, and in an even bigger surprise than that Phoenix mayoral election, I won. After my service in Congress ended (it was 1994, and I’m a Democrat), I decided to start my own firm with my friend and Chief of Staff, which is where I still practice today.

My practice is centered around business and real estate transactions, for both for-profit and nonprofit businesses. My firm has a strong specialty in healthcare and employment work, and we represent a number of Arizona-based and national hospital and healthcare systems. We also represent individuals and small businesses with business, employment, white collar defense, and commercial litigation issues. I have worked at my own firm the longest I have held any job; we celebrated our 20th anniversary in 2015. Having your own firm forces you to enjoy your work; there’s nobody else to blame for unhappiness, which is a powerful incentive for responsibility. It also forces you to be flexible, both in types of work and in dealing with different types of people.

What else I’ve learned is that the most important thing is working with good people. You will spend most of your time with your colleagues, and you need to enjoy being with them or days can get awfully long. Second, you need to do good work, which also you think is worth doing. You need to be able to take pride and some enjoyment in what you do. We represent a lot of nonprofit organizations, and have managed to convert our volunteer work in election law and political experience into a sometimes-paying sideline. And personal relationships matter far more than the type of work. I wind up doing a lot of pretty routine stuff for people I like, and the quality of the relationships with the clients determine my levels of satisfaction much more than any abstract intellectual rigor in the work itself.

So, to extrapolate wildly from my own experience (in the typical way that almost all lawyers think their own choice is what you should do, too): Think most closely about where you’re going, not what you will do initially. Then in choosing a job, choose people you enjoy rather than the type of work. Then find work that allows you to do good, because you’ll spend too much time and effort doing it to not care about it. And finally, work for good clients, people, and institutions you like and respect and for whom you’re willing to work hard.

2017

COZEN O’CONNOR, Member, San Diego, CA
CHARLES E. WHEELER, J.D. 1978
Areas of Specialization: Commercial Litigation, Insurance
12 attorneys in office; 600 total attorneys

After I graduated from Yale, I worked for four years for a mid-sized law firm in Los Angeles. For the last 35 years, I have worked for two Southern California regional offices of East Coast law firms: the Los Angeles office of Rogers & Wells (1982-1994) and the San Diego office of Cozen O’Connor (1994-present).
Cozen’s San Diego office has had 12-20 attorneys ever since I started. Cozen has grown to over 600 attorneys, with its main office in Philadelphia and major regional offices throughout the United States. In general, Cozen expects all of its attorneys to bill 1950 billable hours each year, with 50 pro bono hours.

I have always done commercial litigation. Since 1987 I have primarily represented and advised insurance companies on liability insurance coverage issues. Most of my time is spent in the office. Although I often represent insurance companies in large, multi-insurer litigation, as a practical reality such litigation requires few court appearances, depositions, and trials. The last time I tried a jury trial in an insurance coverage case was in 1989. This is typical of most commercial litigation today, as highly competent mediators can settle almost any commercial dispute. Big law firms are not for attorneys who want to spend their time in the courtroom.

Like most commercial litigation, insurance coverage is document-oriented, and most of my time is spent in analyzing documents, especially insurance policies, and researching case law interpreting such documents. This is not as dull as it sounds. Sophisticated legal work, which is the bread and butter of big law firms, involves a surprising amount of uncertainty about applicable law which requires interpolation of what little authority is available. Sophisticated legal work is an act of creation, because often there simply is no precedent to rely on.

What keeps me interested in practicing as a commercial litigator is the “puzzle” of the legal issues presented to me. In addition, law is still a business which depends on personal contact with other people: clients, other lawyers at Cozen, and opposing lawyers. I still find most big firm lawyers, including opposing counsel, to be honest professionals who are intelligent and interesting to work with. I like the enthusiasm of associates, and always have an “open door” policy for everyone, associates and partners alike, who want to take a seat and discuss a troubling matter. That kind of informal training of associates remains one of the strengths of big law firms, even though it is not always billable under clients’ billing guidelines.

Apart from monetary compensation, the principal benefit of working for large law firms is that the work is sophisticated and therefore interesting. Because the expense of obtaining advice is substantial, large law firms tend to get complicated and/or messy matters that have to be sorted out. This often entails the efforts of a team, which large law firms like Cozen can assemble immediately. For example, there may be a coverage issue where the policy is issued in Texas but the accident occurs in California. Typically, we will need to look at the relevant coverage law in both Texas and California (which may diverge to a surprising degree), and I work with coverage lawyers in Cozen’s Dallas and Houston offices to analyze the issues. As I have known and worked with our Texas lawyers for years, and respect their expertise, I enjoy working with them. I also like them as people, as I do the other members of my department nationwide. I feel that I am part of the best national insurance coverage department in the country, with about 90 lawyers who can deal with insurance issues in all 50 states. Such esprit de corps is typical of departments of most national law firms.

Until 2016, I was one of only five California insurance department attorneys at Cozen, split between the Los Angeles and San Diego. As a result, my “client” in many cases has been the attorney in a different Cozen office who receives an assignment from an insurance company that has a California law component. I am also in many cases “local counsel” for attorneys in other Cozen offices who need a pro hac vice sponsor, and my degree of involvement varies. In general, the Cozen attorney who receives the assignment from the client prefers to control the external contact with the client, which is occasionally awkward. This situation is similar to associates, for whom the “clients” that they must please are other attorneys in the law firm assigning them work. Associates who have a reputation for doing good, timely work attract more work.
Although Cozen has recently added over 10 insurance coverage attorneys in San Francisco and Los Angeles, I continue to get most of my work from other Cozen offices outside California. One of the techniques I have learned to keep the flow of work up is to respond as soon as I can to California law questions directed by email to all of Cozen’s California office, so long as I have some knowledge in the area. I sometimes send a short response and ask if the attorney needs more. For other questions, I may spend fifteen or twenty minutes with a treatise making sure my response is correct. Sometimes the response turns out to be billable, but I do not do the work to increase my billable time. Rather, I do the work to make sure that Cozen as a firm is providing thorough and accurate legal advice, and through a long-standing tradition of attorneys in different states helping each other out. I’m surprised at how often I am the only person to respond to a question. I would expect associates, in particular, to see responding as an opportunity to make contacts in other offices of the firm.

Over the years, I have found that the greatest challenge that any lawyer has at a large law firm is to say “no” to the client of another attorney. The other attorney has a vested interest in keeping the client happy by confirming that the client can do what it wants to do. I’m senior enough at this point to stick to my guns, but junior attorneys have to learn how to say “no.” The consequences of going along with what the client wants, rather than what the attorney thinks is right, can often be disastrous.

From the standpoint of a young attorney, the departmentalization of all large law firms should be an important consideration. Cozen and most large law firms recruit for specific departments, such as tax, real estate, commercial litigation, or insurance. Cozen has always done a lot of lateral hiring, particularly in the insurance department. Cozen has a good summer program in the home office, but we typically hire hourly law clerks from local law schools in San Diego. Our Los Angeles office has one summer associate position.

At least in litigation, the range of cases that an associate in a home office works on is much more limited than the range of cases that associates in regional offices or mid-sized law firms work on. I have always found that my first four years at a mid-sized firm working on a variety of cases, such as will contests and real property disputes, gave me the flexibility to change as the spectrum of legal work I was doing changed. Change in the practice of law is inevitable, and seems to be accelerating. Starting in a department at a large firm typically does not encourage the flexibility that is essential over the course of a career. In addition, the likelihood that a junior associate will take substantive depositions or argue significant motions is fairly low at Cozen, although it is better than a lot of big firms. My younger son graduated from UPenn Law School in 2015 and got a job in Orange County with a small plaintiff’s firm doing consumer and employment litigation and class actions. Although the pay is not “big law” and there are a lot of hours, he has gotten a lot more experience in taking depositions, arguing motions, and settling matters than I ever got in my first couple of years out of Yale, or a first or second year associate at Cozen would get.

Compensation at any private law firm, large or small, is ultimately based on revenue allocation. This creates numerous strains at large law firms, which develop various schemes for crediting revenue between lawyers. For most associates and partners at Cozen, the principal method of determining compensation is amount of revenue collected by the lawyer for work performed. Each lawyer is treated as a separate profit center. The lawyer’s “profitability” is determined by comparing individual revenue with individual compensation plus allocated overhead. The overhead allocation is a perpetual problem for regional offices, which typically do not use many of the services (word processing center, comprehensive library, etc.) which are provided in the home office only, but are “charged” to the regional office attorneys. This presents a problem in acquiring small regional firms to build up regional offices, because the overhead charge may reduce the compensation of small firm lawyers to an unacceptable degree.
Insurance companies have never been willing to pay the billing rates that major corporations and institutions are willing to pay. Accordingly, as a practical matter most insurance lawyers at Cozen are paid less than the corporate practice attorneys in the home office. I have always been willing to take less pay in return for steady work, which is what insurance companies offer. Insurance claims are not dependent on the status of the economy, because the claims arise out of fortuitous events. However, I have also had the advantage of a spouse who has been able to earn as much as I do, which has given me the option to practice insurance law while raising a family.

In general, I stay out of the compensation wars which take place between shareholders or equity partners. These compensation wars primarily involve which attorney receives credit for revenue from institutional clients for work performed by other attorneys. In general, the revenue generated by “personal clients” of shareholders (i.e., clients that the shareholder brought to the firm and would be able to take if she left) is not difficult to allocate. Institutional clients, however, are not in the “pocket” of any individual attorney, so there is a perpetual turf war over the revenue of that client for purposes of compensation. This was true of the national stockbroker clients of Rogers & Wells, and it is true of the major insurance clients of Cozen O’Connor.

Life in a big law firm is never a bed of roses. You have to accept the culture of the firm and the office, or there will be a more or less amicable divorce. The quality of the people I have worked with for the last 36 years has kept me working for big law firms. I am currently thinking I will call it quits with big firms when I turn 66 in 2019, although I will probably keep doing something in the legal world. I have also cut back to 80 percent (i.e., four days a week, with commensurate reduction in billable hours and compensation), which is an option that is available at Cozen, although preparation for a trial that settled in May, 2017, has required me to work five days a week. I am planning to take some vacations in the second half of 2017 to even things out, although I have another big case with a lot of motion practice that is unlikely to settle any time soon.

2017

FENWICK & WEST, Partner, Mountain View, CA
STUART P. MEYER, J.D. 1988
Areas of Specialization: Computer and Technology
268 Attorneys in office; 346 Attorneys total

I first became interested in law while I was in college at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. I was an electrical engineering student, and my primary extracurricular activity was serving as the engineer and chief operator of the university’s radio station. In my tenure there, we got involved in two disputes that mixed technical and legal issues. The first was with a distant television station trying to get its signal into Pittsburgh; they claimed that our radio signal caused interference. The second was with the University of Pittsburgh, just down the street; both Pitt and CMU wanted to expand their operations in ways that were mutually exclusive. As a result of these disputes, I started spending a great deal of time with outside engineering consultants and outside legal counsel. I quickly learned two important lessons. First, most lawyers and administrative law judges had a very difficult time dealing with technology issues. Second, I really enjoyed the juncture between law and technology. Furthering these interests, upon graduation from college I joined an engineering consulting firm and continued working with communications lawyers on such issues.

Over time, I decided that my instincts in college were right and I greatly enjoyed dealing with law and technology issues. After a couple of years working as an engineer, I decided that I wanted to go to law school. I did not, however, want to abandon engineering. To the contrary, I wanted to make sure that I
could still stay deeply involved in technology. Accordingly, I determined that before going to law school, I would return for a year to graduate school to get my masters degree in electrical engineering and computer science.

At about the same time that I entered my graduate engineering work, I started applying to law schools. Even though Yale did not offer very many courses geared toward law and technology, I very much believed in the school’s philosophy. As my law school career progressed, I became more and more enamored with intellectual property as a perfect vehicle for satisfying my law and technology interests. I spent a great amount of time and energy looking at the various law firms that worked with intellectual property. This area provides a number of choices: small firms v. large firms, general practice firms with strong IP practice groups v. IP “boutique” firms, and the like.

My process of interviewing with law firms was fascinating. One of the most important things I learned was how critical the aspects of a firm not reflected on a NALP form were. I originally thought that if one were to put a hundred attorneys together in a firm, the individuals’ characteristics would meld together making most firms alike. I quickly learned that firms had very distinct personalities of their own. Some seemed to favor like-minded attorneys while others enjoyed a more diverse set of views. Some seemed more institutional while others were more familial. Most importantly, I could tell just looking into my interviewers’ eyes whether they really enjoyed their careers or were simply paying the mortgage. As a result of all of my research into law firms, I chose to become a summer associate at Fenwick & West in Palo Alto, CA in 1987. I was delighted that my summer was spent not so much exploring the firm as confirming the truth of what I thought I discovered in my interviewing process.

Upon graduation from Yale Law School, I joined Fenwick & West full-time and again was delighted to simply confirm that life as a newly minted attorney was as I thought it would be. In particular, my goal was to make sure that I had the freedom to grow my practice the way I wanted to in the “fertile soil” of a supportive firm. I did not want to have to compromise my goals simply to conform to an existing structure. Rather than go through in detail how my practice has evolved since that time, suffice it to say that I still enjoy the mixture of law and technology provided in my practice at Fenwick & West. As a partner, my practice today is of course not like it was when I was a first year associate. At each stage of my career, though, I have enjoyed my work and looked forward to the next stage of my professional development. I have enjoyed the fact that new technologies continually spawn new legal issues never considered before. The primary life-lesson I would like to pass on is that time spent in advance thinking about what you want to do is time very well spent. I’ve found it very reassuring to simply confirm the decisions made after much homework and introspection.

In recruiting law students over the past two and a half decades, I have seen many who appear too busy to really figure out what they want to do the next summer or upon graduation. They often make decisions more to keep their options open than to follow any dream they may have. This is particularly common with students who split their summer positions because they can’t decide between two opportunities. My own, personal view (and I realize reasonable people can differ on this) is that many of these people still have trouble deciding after spending a few weeks at each, and that it would have been better for them to front-load the decision-making rather than putting it off.

I suppose an even more fundamental lesson to pass along is that the practice of law is a wonderful career. It provides us with tremendous flexibility and the ability to take our careers virtually anywhere we want. I am grateful, indeed, for the opportunity to have taken this path. 

2017
I entered YLS planning to become a public interest lawyer. As a law student, I volunteered at New Haven Legal Assistance and participated in the San Francisco Affirmative Litigation Project. During my 1L summer, I clerked at the National Center for Youth Law in Oakland, California. I had never seriously considered practicing at a firm until the Fall Interview Program email went around before the start of my 2L year. I was intrigued. After getting feedback from some classmates who had summered at big firms, I decided to throw my hat into the ring. A few weeks later, I found myself with callback offers from a number of firms in the Bay Area.

I had no experience with callback interviews at the time, but I came to realize that they are one of the most important parts of deciding whether to join a firm. I had researched the types of work each firm did, I had studied the firm guides, and I had pumped my friends for gossip about the firms’ summer programs; but until you are actually onsite, speaking with your potential colleagues, you can’t get a real sense of the firm’s culture and whether you would be a good fit. Ultimately, it was my callback experience at Latham that drew me in. At other firms, I spoke with associates who seemed sullen, bored, or unexcited about their work; I asked them to describe things they would change about their firm and received troubling answers; and I met partners who seemed like they would be difficult to work with. Not so at Latham: the associates were upbeat, the partners were pleasant, and I could tell that the office as a whole would be a positive environment in which to start my law practice. Better still, Latham had the most generous pro bono policy I had encountered: no cap on pro bono hours, with pro bono hours counted the same as commercial client hours towards the annual hours goal. Like the other firms I interviewed at, Latham was doing very interesting work; but it was the fit that sealed the deal.

My experience at Latham has exceeded my expectations. My colleagues are incredibly supportive, and the firm invests a great deal in training its associates. For litigators, Latham hosts multi-day deposition and trial academies where associates can moot and receive valuable feedback from seasoned partners. I thought I’d be doing nothing but document review for my first year or two, but in fact I was fortunate to work with supervisors who insist on giving associates meaningful work. When I joined the firm, I was placed on a case headed for trial and spent my days retaining experts, developing witness testimony, compiling fact outlines, and drafting motions. In the years since, a typical day would include research and writing, meetings with colleagues, calls with clients or opposing counsel, or preparing talking points for a hearing or a witness preparation session. My days are varied, which keeps me engaged.

I enjoy my work for three main reasons: first, I like to be challenged. At a large law firm, most clients are seeking help with complex problems. Solving these problems involves a fair amount of creative thinking. Second, my practice has involved a lot of work with witnesses. This human element is very exciting, and it is always fascinating to elicit stories from other people. Third, Latham encourages its associates to take on pro bono work, and I have been able to maintain a robust pro bono practice. This work is very rewarding, and important to me on a personal level.

As a law student considering going into litigation, the main thing you should keep in mind is that your practice will involve a great deal of research, reading, and writing. You will be reviewing documents, caselaw, and the facts of your case, and you will be expected to present cogent arguments drawn from these materials in polished briefs and memoranda. You needn’t have perfect writing skills right out of law school, but writing is such a significant part of a litigator’s craft that you must be willing to put in the effort to continually improve your writing ability.
You should also be assured that there is room for many personality types in the law firm. Many younger attorneys assume that unless they are extroverts, firm life is not for them. This is a misconception, at least at Latham. In our office you will find people from across the personality spectrum, from gregarious and outgoing to reserved and pensive. The common thread, however, is that we work well together. We draw on each other’s unique perspectives, and our work product is made better in the process.

The final piece of advice I would give is that you must be master of your own career. You should seek out mentors at the firm, and work to find meaningful opportunities that will help you become a well-rounded practitioner. Be sure to set goals and regularly assess whether you’re meeting them. As a firm mentor of mine told me, no one cares as much about your career as you. So work hard and make waves; you’ll thank yourself later.

2017

QUINN EMANUEL URQUHART & SULLIVAN, Trial Attorney, Los Angeles CA
PAUL SLATTERY J.D. 2012
Areas of Specialization: Complex Commercial Litigation
129 Attorney Office; 700 Attorneys Total

I litigate out of Quinn Emanuel Urquhart and Sullivan’s Los Angeles office, though my practice has taken me around the country and world. Without assigned practice groups, I’ve tried cases ranging from antitrust to consumer class action to probate law and beyond as both plaintiffs’ and defendants’ counsel. My current cases concern the markets for Supima cotton, contracts between a major insurer and independent broker, the practices of a large home security company, and palimony.

I joined Quinn Emanuel out of law school. Two aspects of my work bring me the most satisfaction, one I expected and one I did not. First, litigation is exciting. That is particularly true when you pursue cases as if they are going to trial and have ownership over those cases. Translating your own preparation into questioning and argument—and seeing in real-time whether it works or does not—lends weight and interest to all you do. I have been the only associate on the vast majority of my cases, including two of my trials, which also makes winning more edifying.

Second, and this I did not fully anticipate, litigation can offer an incredible range of experiences. I moved to Dubai for a month to try a case before the Dubai World Tribunal. I travelled to collect a historic Oscar statuette to return to our client. I have studied nascent hedge funds, the structure of craigslist, the business of superstar magicians, and the economics of managing ports. In each case, I worked closely with industry players and experts. That unexpected breadth in topics and people you meet keeps litigating interesting and fresh over time.

On this score, I benefited from dumb luck, but if there were one unexpected thing grads pointed at law firms and litigation should know, it is this: the law firm and legal market you pick matters. It determines your substantive work, if there is variety in cases, if there is trial work, if you get meaningful experience (depositions, hearings, trial examination, etc.), and if your colleagues will be with you or mostly moving on over time. Those questions are worth pressing, even if you see yourself looking around after a couple years—whatever work you do will be your new pitch.

Finally, please feel free to reach out if you want to discuss any aspect of life after law school or at a law firm. At Yale, I was on various journals and participated in the San Francisco Affirmative Litigation Project with Dean Gerken, which was perfect for transitioning to complex litigation. I am from South Dakota, spent a lot of time in New York, and now live in Los Angeles, which I love. My wife and I got married in my second year, having met at Duke University. Our house is in Venice Beach and increasingly populated by ever more of our dogs, some of whom I admit I like.

2017
I love my job. That may not be something you hear from many attorneys, but I truly love what I do. I am the Managing Attorney for World One Law Group, a law firm that focuses on business and family immigration. This means that I help U.S. citizens and permanent residents reunite in the United States with their spouse, children, parents, and siblings. I also work with businesses to bring in world-class employees to the United States, and to create new companies and opportunities in this country. In other words, I get to make people happy for a living.

I had a varied legal career before starting my own firm. Like many Yale Law School graduates, I clerked for a federal judge after graduation. While this was incredibly satisfying, I realized that litigation was not what I wanted to do in my career. I joined a major law firm in Seattle, Perkins Coie, in their business and e-commerce department. The dot-com crash occurred shortly after I started, leaving me with little work to do. I did some pro bono immigration cases and found that I loved that area of law. After several years at Perkins, I left to teach immigration law at the University of Washington. I then served as the Policy and Advocacy Director at OneAmerica, a local immigrant and refugee rights organization. I also worked for a while at Microsoft Corporation in their immigration group, writing articles about immigration for their internal intranet.

I created my own immigration law firm in 2008, which was not the optimal time to start a business. But we managed to overcome the Great Recession and build a firm that currently has two attorneys, five staff, and hundreds of clients per year. My office is less than a mile from my house, so my commute is less than 5 minutes. I have an amazing, intelligent, and dedicated staff and we help people from all over the world realize their American Dream.

This year, after the 2016 election, I have decided to run for political office. I am a candidate for City Council in Bellevue, Washington in 2017. I am looking forward to using my legal and political skills to chart a new future for my city and region.

I recommend that every Yale Law School graduate follow their passion to create a career that brings joy and satisfaction in your life. I also suggest that you pursue extracurricular activities that allow you to make a difference in your community.

2017

F. Practicing Abroad

BAKER McKENZIE, Partner, London

ADAM FARLOW, J.D. 1997

Areas of Specialization: Corporate Finance and Restructuring

450 attorneys in office; 77 offices in 47 countries and 13,000 people globally

Although I love the United States deeply, immediately after graduation from YLS, I left the continental United States and have lived and practice abroad ever since. I love it. You might, too.

I grew up in a reasonably small town in Mississippi, then went to the University of Mississippi and studied international business and economics. In my sophomore year I founded an exchange program
with the economics department of Moscow State University. The exchange was slightly delayed by the August 1991 coup. On Christmas Day 1991, Gorbachev dissolved the Soviet Union. A week later I was on a plane to Moscow, and I was hooked.

While at YLS, I continued my Russian language studies and spent a bit of time in Russia. I spent my first summer back in Mississippi and in New Orleans. But during 2nd-year interview season, I wrote letters to all of the London “Magic Circle” firms suggesting that they start U.S. summer programs. Jeff Golden, who had just become the first U.S. lawyer at Allen & Overy, took the bait, and I founded the A&O summer program splitting between London and Moscow. Jeff became a life-long friend and mentor.

After the bar exam, I clerked two years for Chief Judge Thomas K. Moore of the District Court of the U.S. Virgin Islands on St. Thomas. It was a wonderful experience. Even though I knew I wanted to do transactional work, seeing the world of litigation for several years is a great learning experience and introduction to life after law school. Life in the Caribbean wasn’t too bad, either!

After St. Thomas, it was back to A&O London for 11 years, and then to Baker McKenzie London in 2010.

There are pros and cons to being an expat lawyer in London. London is obviously a world class city, maybe even the world class city. It is a great place to raise a family. My wife (my high-school sweet heart) loves it, as do my three children. My oldest son goes to England’s oldest school, founded in 948 A.D. Eighteen years ago I did not expect to move to London forever, but once relationships develop, moving on to a new city due to wanderlust loses its luster.

Work life is in many ways no different from what I expect work life is like on Wall Street. But literally all of my work is cross-border—I never work on domestic U.S. matters and very rarely domestic UK matters. Much of my time and energy is spent finding a path that works to get a deal done across a myriad of different local regulations and market practices. Want to list a bank headquartered in Tblisi, Georgia on the London Stock Exchange and sell it to international, including US, investors? —job done!

I primarily practice New York law and U.S. federal securities law. Some time back I also re-qualified as an English solicitor, although there was no particular need to do so. Although there are exceptions, the vast majority of U.S. lawyers practicing in London (or any of the other major money centers) do transactional work: capital markets being predominant, followed by a mix of corporate/M&A, banking, tax and arbitration.

I travel a lot. The last time I counted, I was averaging 2.5 days a week out of the UK. I’ve done deals in at least 36 different countries, and a lot of my work is emerging or frontier markets-focused.

I cannot stress enough the value of being involved with the American Bar Association. Join it. Get stuck in. Join a Section or two in those practice areas in which you hope to practice. Jeff Golden involved me in the ABA Section of International Law, and it has been hugely rewarding. It has opened doors in all sorts of ways and places: last year I testified before India’s Parliamentary Select Committee on Law and Justice. The year before that I presented to the International Organization of Securities Commissioner, which just happened to be meeting on the beautiful island of Mauritius.

The Section of International Law publishes a book entitled Careers in International Law. Buy it and read it. It has a wealth of stories like the ones on this website, and I think every single contributor is a friend of mine through the Section of International Law. The book shows the breadth of opportunity there is for U.S. lawyers to open their own firms abroad and to practice in lots of areas that aren’t immediately obvious.
What do firms look for when hiring abroad? The vast majority of qualities are the same as any domestic position: integrity, work-ethic, an ability to get along with people, intellectual firepower. But in the international context, particularly valued skills include the ability to think laterally, the ability to engage across cultures, an interest in travel, being geographically literate and engaged, and perhaps a bit of a higher level of resilience in dealing with the unknown. The gating question is almost always: would I enjoy being with this person? Foreign language skills are useful, but not absolutely necessary. Up to date vaccinations, particularly yellow fever, probably also helps.

2017

CLEARY GOTTLIB STEEN & HAMILTON LLP, Partner, Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates
GAMAL ABOUALI, J.D. 1996

Areas of Specialization: Corporate Law, Mergers and Acquisitions, Capital Markets
7 Attorneys in office; Over 1,200 Attorneys Total

I am currently a partner in the Abu Dhabi office of Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton LLP. I graduated from Yale Law School in 1996, having previously completed a Master’s degree at Stanford University and my undergraduate studies at Dartmouth College.

My practice focuses primarily on mergers and acquisitions, capital markets transactions and projects, specializing in cross-border transactions. Cleary Gottlieb is not rigidly organized by department, and encourages its lawyers to be multidisciplinary.

I always planned to have an international career, as I grew up in Kuwait and had the advantage of being schooled in English, Arabic and French. Cleary Gottlieb was a top choice for me because of the firm’s international outlook. Nearly half of the firm’s lawyers work in our 14 offices outside the United States.

Cleary Gottlieb promotes a “one-firm” culture in large part by encouraging lawyers to work in different offices. I started my career in the firm’s New York office in 1997 and soon moved to the Paris office. I returned to New York in 2004 and became partner in 2006, at which time I returned to Paris.

As a partner in the Paris office I was required to become a member of the Paris Bar. Accordingly, I had to become (at least minimally) proficient in a legal system that is the cradle of the civil law tradition across the globe. It was a very interesting and rewarding experience, and certainly helped me be a more useful lawyer in countries with a civil law tradition (which undoubtedly represent the majority of countries today).

In 2011 I was offered the opportunity of opening a Cleary Gottlieb office in Abu Dhabi, which was intended to become the hub for our practice across the Middle East and North Africa region. Opening and managing the office has undoubtedly been the greatest challenge of my professional career. Working in the Middle East has transformed the nature of my work into something that is much more entrepreneurial than what I had experienced in Paris and New York. While the office itself is small, my team works closely with more than 20 partners and counsel in London, Paris, New York and other offices. We have had many successes but there have also been many challenges. The challenges are important for personal growth. Everyone deserves to have a humbling experience at least once in their career, in order to help them learn more about themselves, their strengths and their weaknesses.

One of the most challenging aspects of my work is needing to have the mental agility to successfully navigate the diverse legal systems in the Middle East region. When moving from country to country one must reset one’s thought parameters before being able to provide advice on structuring transactions. In emerging markets, it is always a challenge to balance the need for robustness with the pressure to make the deal happen. One must often come up with creative solutions.
Yale Law School always emphasized the importance of public service and I take that to heart. This dovetailed with Cleary Gottlieb’s support for pro bono work and public service. In 1999, as a second year associate, I requested from Cleary Gottlieb permission to take a sabbatical year in order to serve as a legal adviser to the Palestine Liberation Organization in the interim and permanent status negotiations with the Israeli side. This would have been a career-ending move at many other firms, but Cleary Gottlieb strongly encouraged me to seize the opportunity. My work in this role relied heavily on the research I had done for my Supervised Analytical Writing requirement, which analyzed Israeli practices as they related to Palestinian water resources under international human rights and humanitarian law.

In addition to my work advising the PLO, immediately following graduation I worked as a Schell Fellow at Human Rights Watch and am now on the advisory committee of the Human Rights Watch MENA division. I also serve on the Board of Trustees of Taawon, the leading Palestinian non-governmental organization. In addition to my general duties as a member of the board, Cleary Gottlieb provides pro bono advice to Taawon in a variety of areas including governance, lease agreements, anti-money laundering compliance issues and other areas. I believe it is important to do public service, not just to use the skills you have learnt for the benefit of society at large, but also to enrich one’s own career.

The most rewarding aspects of my role are the intellectual stimulation I receive from my work and the rewards related to being part of the Cleary Gottlieb partnership. The firm values of collegiality, trust and respect aptly describe how our partnership operates. You could call it a mutual support group of 190+ highly talented and motivated people who are working together with a common purpose and supporting each other professionally, financially and personally.

I have always enjoyed working with YLS graduates. If you believe you will thrive in a firm that emphasizes excellence and collegiality and are enthusiastic about practicing law in a dynamic international setting, Cleary Gottlieb could be a good fit for you.

2017

FIELDFISHER LLP, Partner, Paris, France
CHRISTOPHER J. MESNOOH, J.D. 1983
Areas of Specialization: Mergers & Acquisitions; International Technology Transactions
Size of Office: 40 lawyers Size of Firm: approximately 500 lawyers

Nothing in law school could have prepared me for the career path that I have followed since 1983. Whether this is reassuring or alarming—I vote for the former—it remains a truism that life can take strange and unforeseen turns.

After graduating in 1983, I obtained a Master’s of International Affairs at Columbia University, before commencing the practice of law at a large firm in New York known for international practice. I had always dreamed of a career where foreign travel, languages and cultures would be an integral part of my existence, but this is not how things panned out with the firm in New York. So after a year, I started looking for a job overseas, specifically in Paris, since I had a reasonably good level of French and the idea of living there was seductive on every level.

After three years of many round trips and futile interviews, a small French law firm, which prided itself on having both Yale and Harvard graduates amongst its lawyers, made me an offer, at precisely 50% of my New York salary. The moment to decide how much I wanted Paris had arrived, and after a couple of days of thought, I accepted the offer, avec joie. The firm did the paperwork to get me my immigration card, and off I went, in September 1989.
The learning curve was fascinating: learning a new legal system, when I had barely mastered the American one, and in a foreign language to boot. And advising clients despite my shaky grasp of many of the concepts that made a corporate lawyer what he or she is. It took about a year before I began to feel comfortable advising on technical points of French corporate law, although I rarely gave written advice without consulting the requisite books and double checking with colleagues.

I became a member of the Paris Bar in 1992, which allowed me to contemplate staying definitively in France. My niche, which was advising American companies investing in France, was reinforced by the years spent practicing French law. And many American clients were pleased to hear a New York accent at the other end of the phone when calling Paris.

I left my first firm after four years, and started my own practice in Paris. It was the middle 1990s and the Internet boom had started. Entrepreneurship was everywhere, and I wanted to see what I could do outside of an established structure. My firm prospered for seven years, and I began to travel frequently to California to meet clients and prospect for new ones. A very heady experience that serves as one of my life’s great accomplishments, all the more so since it was lived in a foreign country.

In 2001, I was invited to join the partnership of the illustrious firm of Hughes Hubbard & Reed, in Paris, to reinforce their capabilities in corporate law and IT transactions. My practice continued to expand, and frequent trips to New York were added to those to California. The international practice of which I had dreamed had become a confirmed reality.

After eight satisfying years at HHR, I was asked to join the partnership of a UK law firm, Field Fisher Waterhouse (since renamed Fieldfisher). The firm had a very strong technology practice, including in European privacy issues, and they were interested in having an American partner to help attract U.S. companies to the firm, both in Paris and in London. Not knowing much about the UK legal market (as opposed to the U.S. market), and relishing the prospect of frequent trips to London, I joined the partnership in July 2009.

My practice has continued to expand, and having a London base is an undeniable advantage (the vote to leave the EU will have ramifications that are too early to predict at this time).

Practicing overseas is highly unusual. Many American lawyers who practice in Europe, especially out of London, advise on American law (securities and white collar practices), often to European companies heading toward the United States or involved in U.S. regulatory issues.

My choice was the opposite: to immerse myself fully in a second legal system, which necessarily meant redoing law school, figuratively speaking. It also meant endlessly perfecting my language skills, since corporate law is as dependent on the ability to speak and write convincingly as is litigation.

But the satisfaction is incalculable. The fact that this is not the career path which I could have imagined has made the experience life altering in every way. Helping American companies navigate their way through a country as complicated as France, and beyond it the European Union, means that everything that I do is “international”, and hence, fascinating at a very basic level. This is not to say that there is not a certain routine in much of what I do, because of course there is. But the clash of cultures, languages and legal systems, which is a permanent part of my professional life, ensures that each case, be it a small or a large one, has aspects to it which render it interesting beyond the simple legal merits.

Living overseas is not for everyone, and living overseas for twenty-seven years, even less so. There are issues of self-identification, and feelings of belonging, and sometimes of not belonging, which have to be dealt with continuously. Conquering the language of the country where you live is essential, but it is
surprising for me to see so many expats who do not make the effort, or only make it halfheartedly, all the more so since French is a fairly easy language to learn for English speakers.

Finally, Paris is not known for being the easiest place for a foreigner to find acceptance, but, once found, the experience of living and practicing law there is unparalleled, and after all of these years, I still rejoice in the serendipity which brought me here so many years ago.

2016

G. Practicing at a Public Interest Law Firm

BROWN, GOLDSTEIN & LEVY, LLP, Partner, Baltimore, MD
JESSIE WEBER, J.D. 2009

Areas of Specialization: Civil Litigation, Civil Rights, Wage and Hour Violations
21 Attorneys

After graduating from law school, I moved to Baltimore for a clerkship. I had visited the city a few times, but never imagined living here. I was excited about clerking for my judge and figured Baltimore would be a fine place to spend a year. That year has now turned into eight and I hope to be here for many years to come! Soon after moving here, I quickly fell in love with this small, vibrant, quirky, affordable, artsy city—a city with some deep, systemic problems to be sure, but with a lot of energy devoted to creative solutions.

A few months into my clerkship, I learned of the Francis D. Murnaghan, Jr. Appellate Advocacy Fellowship at the Public Justice Center here in Baltimore. I was not sure if I wanted to spend a year doing only appellate work, but knew it would afford me an opportunity to work at a fantastic public interest organization on a wide variety of social justice issues. I went for it and was not disappointed. I learned that I loved appellate advocacy and the skills I honed that year have served me very well in my trial-level work as well. Because Baltimore has a very close-knit public interest legal community, the fellowship also gave me the chance to partner with and learn from many great attorneys in the city and throughout the state. When I was considering taking on a disability rights case, my supervisor suggested that I reach out to some of the attorneys at my current firm, Brown, Goldstein & Levy (BGL), who do extensive work in this area. I did and these attorneys encouraged me to take on the appeal (which ultimately proved successful and gave me my first opportunity to argue in a federal circuit court). When I was a law clerk, I had seen some of these attorneys argue a case involving blind law school graduates’ access to the bar exam and was very impressed. I knew that BGL had a strong reputation as a leading civil rights law firm, but that it also handled other types of litigation. I liked the idea of litigating in a small law firm with great lawyers, working on a diverse array of cases (with an emphasis on those serving the public interest), and remaining in Baltimore. I became focused on trying to work at BGL following my fellowship. Because of the size of the firm, BGL does not regularly hire new associates. I was very fortunate that the timing worked out for me—although I did have to wait patiently until my fellowship was nearly over to receive the offer.

I have now been at BGL for almost six years and made partner this past January. In law school, I never thought I would end up at a law firm—I thought I would work for a non-profit—but I have loved life at my small, unique firm (with the exception of having to bill my time, which is never fun). I appreciate the diversity of my cases and clients. I frequently represent the National Federation of the Blind in cutting edge disability rights cases around the country, but I also enjoy representing individuals in the Maryland/DC area who are struggling with employment issues, trying to access benefits, or otherwise need legal assistance. I have also represented classes of employees, from school bus drivers to restaurant workers, seeking fair pay. Given the trend towards specialization in one particular subject area of the law,
I am very grateful that I have gotten to work on such a broad array of cases. I think being able to draw on a wide range of experiences litigating different types of cases has made me a stronger and more creative litigator.

I have also been grateful for my firm’s commitment to supporting work-life balance and community involvement. Associates and partners are encouraged to volunteer and be actively engaged in our communities. BGL has been incredibly supportive as I have devoted extensive time in the past few years serving as board president of FreeState Justice, Maryland’s statewide LGBTQ legal services and policy advocacy organization, as well as serving on the board of the ACLU of Maryland. And my decision, as a non-birth parent, to take parental leave the summer before becoming a partner was met with enthusiasm.

A great benefit of working at a small/medium-sized firm (we are now 21 attorneys) is that cases are generally staffed more leanly, giving associates opportunities to develop real litigation skills. Within my first two years at BGL, I took and defended depositions, argued in court, met with clients on my own, handled settlement negotiations, and examined witnesses during trial. I don’t know of any associates at large law firms who had similar experiences that early in their careers.

I feel very lucky to have ended up, somewhat haphazardly, in Baltimore and to have found BGL once here. I knew of one civil rights law firm in law school, but had not realized that there are a number of public-interest and public-interest-oriented small law firms around the country. I had wrongly assumed that I would end up in New York (where I’m from) or DC. I think many law students don’t consider the fulfilling work that can be done in smaller cities throughout the country and the variety of organizations and law firms from which one can do that work. So my advice to law students is to break out of the major city, big non-profit/big law firm bubble and think about other possibilities for doing engaging, high-level work in locations that could prove to be great places to live.

2017

WALTZER, WIYGUL & GARSIDE, LLC, Associate Attorney, New Orleans, LA
MICHAEL BROWN, J.D. 2011
Areas of Specialization: Environmental, Environmental Justice
6-8 attorneys

I work at a small law firm that focuses on public-interest environmental and environmental justice cases in the Gulf South, called Waltzer, Wiygul & Garside.

After law school, I spent two years as a law clerk, the last of which brought me to New Orleans. Although not from this part of the country, I fell in love with the city and wanted to stay. I also was strongly interested in environmental justice issues and sensed a big unmet need for lawyers working in that area. The gap in services also means that there really are no litigation jobs available here at non-profit environmental groups, like Sierra Club or Earthjustice, and few in the government.

Through networking, I found my current firm and job. (There was no job posting, which is often the case in small-firm hiring. It really pays to reach out for informational interviews.) Two of the three partners worked for non-profit environmental organizations before entering private practice, and all three are wonderful people. They wanted to take on environmental cases and also serve some of Louisiana and Mississippi’s most vulnerable coastal communities, including Vietnamese-immigrant fishermen and Native Americans who live on Louisiana’s fast-eroding coastal bayous. While in law school, I had never seriously thought about working at a private firm, but I jumped at the chance to do mission-driven environmental cases and also to serve individual clients from communities of color.
Going on four years in, it has been a truly rewarding experience. I am thrust into the thick of exhilarating issues ranging from the BP Oil Spill, to coastal erosion and climate change, to contamination of the Mississippi River delta. I work with lawyers with many years of experience in environmental and community lawyering who have helped me to develop confidence and skills as an advocate. My clients range from Sierra Club and regional environmental groups to individual fishermen and community organizations. I have lots of direct contact with all our clients.

The pay is also substantially better than at comparable non-profit organizations in the city, although it is well below traditional law firm salaries. COAP helps pay my loans. We work hard, and the hours can occasionally be quite long, but work-life balance is valued by everyone in the firm. I have a rich and active life outside of the office and am almost always in control of my weekends.

Working at a small firm is not like working at a larger organization. For (mostly) better and (sometimes) worse, there is almost no bureaucracy—no board of directors, no dedicated HR department, and a very flat hierarchy. This means we can be tremendously nimble and take on an array of challenges that comparable groups in the public and non-profit sector simply could not. It also means that priorities and job descriptions can shift on a dime. It’s not always easy to stop and talk about long-term planning, professional development, and office management issues.

In addition, we need to make payroll based on our success in litigation—under federal statutory fee-shifting provisions or contingency. This can require turning down important cases that would be difficult to win or when the law does not allow recovery of attorney’s fees from the defendant. It also means taking on some non-environmental work—cases involving insurance, personal injury, or contract issues, for example—that can ensure a steady stream of revenue while serving our same client communities. These have been excellent for honing my skills, but can take me away from the more mission-centered work.

My job in a number of ways combines the best elements of private and non-profit practice. I’d recommend that YLS graduates interested in public-interest litigation consider whether similar firms might be right for them.

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