Study of Law School Alumni

Employment & Satisfaction

Employment Outcomes Three Years After Graduation

Class of 2019
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Selected Results

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Study of Law School Alumni Employment & Satisfaction - Class of 2019 | 2
Executive Summary

The survey responses were provided by 1,927 Class of 2019 alumni from 42 U.S. law schools, between November 2022 and January 2023.

Employment Profile

High and consistent employment rate: 97% of respondents reported they were employed at the time of the survey (the same rate as the Class of 2018); 99% reported full-time employment, with 96% employed in “permanent or long-term” positions (i.e., lasting more than one year). Law firms were the most frequently cited work setting (51%), followed by businesses or corporations (16%), and government (13%). Most unemployed alumni were actively seeking employment. [pp. 26-32]

Hybrid schedules lead: Over one-half (57%) of employed graduates reported they worked in a hybrid environment, rising from 49% for the Class of 2018. Among graduates working in law firms, hybrid arrangement rates increased with law firm size. [pp. 33-35]

Annual Compensation

Slow, steady increase: Alumni reporting annual compensation over $300,000 increased slightly to 6%, up from 4% the prior year. Graduates reporting total annual compensation of $51,000-$100,000 declined to 37% from the Class of 2018’s 46%. [pp. 36-40]

Compensation aligned with law firm size: Nearly one quarter (24%) of graduates working in firms with more than 500 lawyers reported annual compensation in the top range (over $300,000), while over one half (51%) of all graduates working in law firms reported annual compensation over $150,000. Almost one quarter (22%) of solo practitioners reported annual compensation of $50,000 or less. [p. 41]

Mobility

Highly mobile: 71% of alumni have held two or more sequential positions since graduation: 40% reported holding two jobs since graduation. Only one third (31%) have held only one job since
graduation. For the past two years, male and female mobility rates were similar; in prior years, females changed jobs more often. As historically has been the case, graduates of color continued to change jobs more often than their White/Caucasian peers. [pp. 43-51]

**Low levels seeking job change:** 13% of employed alumni reported they were actively seeking a new job, a historically low rate (down from 14% for the Class of 2018). There was virtually no difference in active job seeking status among male and female graduates. However, graduates of color continued to seek new positions at higher rates than White/Caucasian graduates did. [pp. 52-54]

**NEW: Reasons for job changes:** For those who have held more than one position, “better compensation/bonuses” (62%) and “attitude ‘fit’ concerns” (42%) emerged as the leading reasons for job movement. [pp. 55-61]

**Work Setting and Career Track**

**Law firm positions:** Just over one half (51%) of alumni were working in private practice, with male and White/Caucasian graduates reporting this at higher rates than female graduates and graduates of color. The vast majority of alumni, across all demographics, were practicing lawyers. [pp. 76-82]

**Partnership aspirations:** Over three quarters (77%) of graduates working in law firms intended to pursue a partnership trajectory, with 20% expecting a non-partnership track. [pp. 84-85]

**Litigation leads practice areas:** 60% of law firm respondents selected “litigation” as their primary practice area; a rate double that of those selecting “transactional” (30%). [pp. 86-87]

**Dimensions of Satisfaction**

**Overall job satisfaction levels increased:** 47% of Class of 2019 alumni reported being “extremely satisfied” with their current job, rising from 42% of 2018 graduates; 38% were “somewhat satisfied.” [pp. 88-99]

**Hybrid schedules and job satisfaction:** Graduates working in a hybrid model or completely in the office reported higher average overall job satisfaction than those working 100% remotely. [p. 90]
Satisfaction metrics for current roles: Alumni were most satisfied with “job security,” “attitude or ‘fit’ with their organization’s culture,” and “level of responsibility you have,” while “support for mental health and well-being” and “compensation” received the lowest ratings. [pp. 92-99]

Key skills for practice: Alumni reported “ethics and professional responsibility,” followed by “teamwork” and “litigation/legal skills” (including legal research, analysis, writing and trial advocacy) were the most important skill sets for their current positions.
[pp. 100-104]

Efficacy of law school preparation: Alumni were most satisfied with how well law school prepared them in “ethics and professional responsibility” followed by “litigation/legal skills” such as legal research, analysis, writing, and trial advocacy, but significantly less satisfied with their preparation in “law practice management skills” such as administrative operations, management, and project management. [pp. 105-109]

Experiential Learning

Participation levels: 95% of graduates had participated in at least one experiential learning experience during law school, with 68% listing externships, internships, and/or field placements, followed closely by 66% citing legal practice skills or simulation courses, with substantially lower levels participating in clinics representing individual clients (50%) or policy/issue clinics (14%). Among clinic participants, 64% participated for one semester, while 25% participated for two; 11% participated for more than two semesters.1 [pp. 115-121]

NEW: Discussions with subsequent jobs: 85% of employed alumni reported they discussed their law school experiential courses while interviewing for their first post-graduate jobs, and the majority (72%) reported they continued to discuss these experiences during interviews for their current roles. [pp. 124-126]

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1The ABA requires law school graduates to complete at least six credit hours of experiential education. 
https://www.americanbar.org/content/dam/aba/administrative/legal_education_and_admissions_to_the_bar/governancedocuments/2015_standards_303_304_experiential_course_requirement_.pdf
NEW: Professional Identity Formation

NEW: Efficacy of law school preparation: Alumni rated the value of their law school preparation in “lawyer’s obligations to clients and society” and “providing pro bono/community service” the highest, while rating their preparation in “well-being practices” the lowest. [pp. 127-128]

NEW: Law school resources: Overwhelmingly, alumni cited clinical/experiential courses (70%) as the top resources for advancing their professional identities while in school, while only 17% rated Student Affairs programs/resources as such. [pp. 129-130]

NEW: Post-graduate resources: Alumni identified colleagues and peers (66%) as the resources most helpful for their ongoing professional identity formation, followed by employer and Bar association programs and events (54% and 50%). Interestingly, 14% of alumni reported no valued resources for this purpose. [pp. 131-132]

Post-Graduate Law School Engagement

Preferred methods: Consistent with prior trends, networking events and mentoring programs were graduates’ top choices for engaging with their law schools, with service in alumni associations and financial contributions listed at much lower rates. [pp. 133-136]

Engagement barriers: Similar to last year’s study, limited time (49%) and location/geography (37%) were the main barriers to graduates’ law school engagement. Less than one quarter of participating graduates reported lack of interest (23%) and student debt (16%) barriers. [pp. 137-138]

Limited use of law school career resources post-graduation: Only 20% of respondents requested post-graduate career assistance from their law school; for these, the Career Service Office was the primary point of contact, followed by faculty members. Few reached out to their Alumni Office for this purpose. [pp. 139-141]
Financing Legal Education - The View Three Years After Graduation

Educational debt increased: While average educational debt was $105,546 and the median was $90,000, debt loads ranged widely, from zero to $530,000. The vast majority (87%) of graduates’ total educational debt was attributable to law school (up from 83% for the Class of 2018). Although just over one quarter (28%) reported no remaining educational debt, a sizeable number (43%) reported a debt load of more than $100,000 three years out of law school. [pp. 142-146]

Debt load deviated by cohort: White/Caucasian alumni, judicial clerks, and graduates of the top 21-50 law schools reported the lowest average amount of outstanding debt. [pp. 142-146]

Profound impact: Graduates reported their debt level influenced job and life choices, including delaying purchase of a home, deciding where to live, when to have children, and what sector to work in. [p. 149]

Impact of COVID-19 Pandemic

Mental health and well-being: Troublingly, 39% of graduates reported the continuing pandemic affected their mental health and well-being, an increase from 31% reported by the Class of 2018. Notably, the pandemic affected women’s mental health and well-being at higher rates than their peers. [p. 151-155]

Additional effects: Nearly one third (32%) of graduates reported a negative effect on loan repayment, while in contrast, 20% of graduates reported a positive professional effect (up from 14% for the Class of 2018). Those reporting no impact also increased to 18% from 13% for the Class of 2018. [pp. 151-155]
Methodology

In November 2022, The NALP Foundation and NALP invited the Deans of all ABA-accredited law schools in the U.S. and Canada to participate in this annual research project to measure law school alumni employment status and career satisfaction three years after graduation. The NALP Foundation and NALP provided a standardized electronic survey instrument to participating law schools, who distributed it to their Class of 2019 graduates. Data collection took place between November 2022 and January 2023.

Alumni from 47 law schools throughout the U.S. and Canada participated in the survey. The results in this report reflect the aggregate information collected from 1,927 graduates of 42 U.S. law schools. The average response rate among participating schools was 24%, ranging from 8% to 44%. Both the number and identities of law schools participating in the annual law school alumni surveys varies from year to year, which necessarily may influence results. This year, The NALP Foundation and NALP secured a general grant from the AccessLex Institute® to support the participation of HBCU law schools and law schools with significant levels of students and alumni from groups underrepresented in the legal profession.

This year’s survey added information on professional identity formation, the timing of recruitment for post-graduate positions, and reasons for graduates’ professional shifts, enabling schools to track key issues and benchmark against other law schools. The survey continued to probe remote work and the pandemic’s impact on alumni careers, as well as their preferred ways to engage with their law schools, providing critical insights for alumni outreach and development efforts.

The report analyzes graduates’ aggregate data, as well as segmenting the data by demographic categories including gender and gender identity, race/ethnicity, first generation status, disability status, work setting, and law school rank (see Appendix pp. 165-179). For the purpose of this study, “associates of color” includes associates who self-identify as Asian, Black/African-American, Latinx, Native American or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Multi-racial and other non-white/Caucasian. Many of these groups are underrepresented in the legal profession and additional action is merited and required in order to achieve greater diversity, equity and inclusion within the legal industry.
About The NALP Foundation

The NALP Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; our mission is to improve the quality and delivery of legal services by advancing excellence in strategic and practical organizational leadership, effective management of legal personnel, professional development of lawyers, access to and diversity within the profession and ethical practices and professionalism. For over 25 years, The NALP Foundation has conducted unique benchmark research, and delivered exceptional educational programming and publications based on this research. For more information on The NALP Foundation and our research and programming, please visit www.nalpfoundation.org.

About NALP

The National Association for Law Placement (NALP) is an association of over 3,000 legal career professionals who advise law students, lawyers, law offices, and law schools in North America and beyond. What brings NALP members together is a common belief in three fundamental things. First, all law students and lawyers should benefit from a fair and ethical hiring process. Second, law students and lawyers are more successful when supported by professional development and legal career professionals. Third, a diverse and inclusive legal profession best serves clients and our communities. That’s why NALP members work together every day to collect and publish accurate legal employment data and information, and champion education and standards for recruiting, professional and career development, and diversity and inclusion. For over 50 years, NALP has played an essential role in the success of its members and the lawyers and law students they serve.

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