



ESSAY

Small Efforts to Level the Playing Field

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At my law school, in addition to being a legal practice professor, I serve as Assistant Dean for Placement in the career services office. One of the primary challenges I face in this role is communicating important information that may impact a student's career options. The average law student receives over 100 emails per day.¹ Students receive emails from professors, law school administrators, third-party vendors, student organizations, and Canvas, not to mention spam and advertisements. With the crushing weight of first semester classes, it is difficult for students to find time to filter every email for important information. Yet for the many students who come to law school without any knowledge of legal career opportunities or the recruiting timeline, ignoring career information during their 1L year could impact their career outcomes.

Students begin law school with varied levels of understanding regarding legal careers and the legal recruitment process. According to the National Association for Law Placement, approximately 22.5% of the Class of 2020 graduates were first-generation college students, and 63% of the Class of 2020 were first-

¹ Jason Wise, *How Many Emails Does the Average Person Receive per Day in 2022?*, EARTHWEB, (July 20, 2022), <https://earthweb.com/how-many-emails-does-the-average-person-receive-per-day>.

generation law students.² In my experience, students with attorney parents frequently have a solid understanding of legal career options, an extensive legal network, and first-hand insight into the legal recruiting process. At the other end of the spectrum, first-generation students are often unfamiliar with what it means to clerk or work in Big Law, much less the process of building a competitive application for those positions.

Acknowledging this information gap, career services offices, like mine, try our best to reach students through a variety of mediums: emails, signage throughout the campus, calendars of upcoming events, and deadlines. But despite our best efforts, we often hear students claiming, “they didn’t know.” They didn’t know that many 1L summer internship positions have deadlines in January. They didn’t know on-campus interviews were happening; they didn’t know that they missed interview opportunities; they didn’t know that many legal employers look for participation in a law journal. I never want any student to miss an opportunity because “they didn’t know.”

To better reach 1L students and fill the information gap that often exists, especially for first-generation students, I have incorporated a 30-second “career moment” into my legal practice class. By spending 30 seconds each week on career-related information, we can help level the playing field for all students. Amplifying and synthesizing the messages from our schools’ career services office help ensure students understand the small things they can do during their first year of law school to prepare for a successful post-graduate job search.

One way to build a 30-second career moment is to partner with your school’s career services to understand the 1L-career timeline and create a schedule of announcements that aligns with your career services office’s messaging to students. Being added to your career services’ email distribution list will also provide insight into upcoming deadlines and events. While every career services office has its own timeline for working with 1L students and its own unique programs, all students would benefit from (1) understanding the nuts and bolts of their career services office, including drop-in hours, instructions for making appointments, and the scope of services offered; (2) receiving a general timeline for 1L recruiting; and (3) gaining an understanding of what legal employers look for in hiring.

For example, in my class, I use my weekly 30 seconds in September to make sure students know the physical location of the career services office, the services it offers (*e.g.*, resume and cover letter review), its hours of operation, and

² *New Findings on Disparities in Employment Outcomes Based on Level of Parental Education*, NAT’L ASS’N FOR L. PLACEMENT (Nov. 2021), <https://www.nalp.org/1121research>.

how to make an appointment with a career advisor. I also encourage students interested in a public interest career to speak with their career advisor about whether it makes sense for them to participate in the Equal Justice Works Career Fair. Throughout October, I highlight upcoming on- and off-campus networking opportunities and encourage students to meet with their career advisor to start updating and polishing their resumes and cover letters. Students often do not realize that many 1L summer internship opportunities open (and sometimes close) over winter break, and so in November, as the semester nears its end, I focus my 30 second-career moment on reminding students that they should consider using some of their time over winter break to finalize their application materials and start applying.

When students return after winter break, I highlight winter and spring on-campus interview dates and deadlines, remind students to order their official transcripts, and recommend that students speak with a career advisor about how their first semester GPA impacts their application strategy. By mid-March, many students find themselves discouraged, having spent weeks (if not months) applying without success. During late March and early April, I speak to the importance of resilience in the job search, while also encouraging students to do a simple self-assessment. Students who submitted many applications but received few interviews might benefit from a fresh look at their resume and cover letter. Similarly, students who received many interviews, but no offers, should ask their career advisor for candid advice on their interviewing skills. Finally, approaching the end of the semester, I remind students of the 2L summer recruiting timeline and highlight the importance of certain extra-curricular activities for some types of post-graduate positions, including participation in the write-on competition for aspiring clerks and trial team try-outs for aspiring litigators.

The intention of these 30-second career tips is not to assume the role of career advisor for our students. Rather, it is to use our positions as trusted professors to reinforce the messaging of our career services office to ensure that it reaches as many students as possible. While students may ultimately decide to opt out of certain career-related activities, spending 30 seconds to highlight timely career-related information will help level the playing field and ensure no student misses an important opportunity because they didn't know.