

What Can You Do With Your Law Degree?

SOUTH TEXAS
COLLEGE OF LAW

The Career Resources Center

WHAT CAN I DO WITH A LAW DEGREE?

While the majority of law school graduates go immediately into traditional legal jobs – jobs with the title “lawyer” – thousands of law-trained people find that their career paths take them to jobs where legal training is crucial to performance, but where the title isn’t “lawyer.” These are jobs that do not require a law degree, but can be enhanced because of skills learned in law school. Many of the skills learned in law school (analytical skills, advocacy, communication, research, and the ability to break down a problem into its component parts) are directly transferable to other professions.

HOW DO I FIND THESE POSITIONS?

METHOD 1: Follow your lifelong dream. The most direct method of finding an alternative career is to follow through with whatever has interested or obsessed you since the seventh grade. If you came to law school to “do something, but not law,” assess your skill set, which now contains legal analysis and problem solving. Combining new skills and old passions with the contacts that you have developed and will develop because you are interested in a particular issue, will help you give concrete shape to your goals. You will then be able to create a plan to achieve those goals.

METHOD 2: Find your dream. Identify your interests, define your skills, and target prospective employers by understanding their problems and how you can contribute to the solutions. As you sat through law school or worked for some years, do you find yourself particularly interested in one topic? Bring an open mind to discussions of interesting though slightly harebrained schemes, and trust your instincts. Especially for a political science major who never considered anything but law school since the seventh grade, identifying an alternate career -- which may be as mildly offbeat as non-trial work -- is difficult but achievable. Lawyers leave traditional practice all the time.

Issues to explore:

Alternative for whom? Much of what is “non-traditional” for lawyers may be a very traditional career path for someone with specialized training. For example, a Director of Human Resources position may “require” an MBA with a concentration in Personnel. Your four years of employment law could be an appropriate substitute.

What are your interests? If you are interested in sports, and want to represent quarterbacks, unless you are a former pro player or related to one, it may be time to expand your vision of the business of sports. Brainstorm your way through a football game and a football player’s career, considering every bit of instruction, gear, infrastructure, coaching, equipment, insurance, media, sports paraphernalia, licensing by teams and players, licensing by municipalities and more. Note that there are lawyers with clients every step of the way from junior high leagues to the NFL, and that both the helmets and the hot dogs at the sporting events have multiple layers of representation.

What are your skills? If you have managed a litigation caseload or an undergraduate residence hall, you could be a candidate for jobs calling for balancing the competing interests of clients, patients, customers, and suppliers who want immediate attention unless substantive training in something like nuclear physics is required.

Who are prospective employers? After defining your interests and skill sets, identify employers with relevant problems is a junior-high level research project. At this stage, you identify the employer's needs to determine whether they mesh with your desires. You will find yourself reviewing the business press, and the literature of your target industries.

How do you “know” if a new career is right for you? The next step is to talk to someone in your target industry – or better yet, someone who has your “dream job.” You will be surprised at the number of people who will talk to you when you call or write beginning with “I admire the work that you do and want to get into your field. May I have 15 minutes of your time?” In these conversations you employ all of your old “Information Interview” techniques, asking about the actual day-to-day work, the relationships between and among colleagues and other constituents, the joys of the job, the stresses of the work and absolutely anything else that you want or need to know. This step is crucial, especially for lawyers making a career change. You know what you don’t like about the job/career you have. This is your chance to make sure that you’re not about to replace one uncomfortable work environment for another.

How do you approach those employers? Make a marketing plan and keep in mind that you are the product. Identify the employers who are your targets, figure out ways to meet people in those industries. Read their journals. Join their professional associations. Go to their meetings. Know what you have to offer, and be systematic and persistent in your approach.

At the same time, listen to the people you meet, one or more whom may present some harebrained scheme, for a business or a project that might be “right up your alley.” Pay attention. One of them might be the next Steve Jobs or Steven Spielberg. When something comes along that sounds good, trust your instincts (but do some due diligence on the project, too.)

Should I rewrite my resume? A typical legal resume summarizes your experience in language that other lawyers understand. You will need to revise your resume to describe your skills and experiences in words that make sense to non-lawyers. Instead of “Handled 30 arraignments a day” you might describe your work in more detail using “managed,” “presented,” “organized” and “summarized.”

Will they hate me because I’m a lawyer? “Hate” is, perhaps, too strong a word for the resistance that you may encounter. Some people have had dreadful experiences with law-trained people who were less than cooperative or who were perhaps not the best of team players. Be prepared in your meetings and interviews to explain (repeatedly) that your complex skill set includes more than “just law,” and reiterate the fact that you are a team player.

METHOD 3: Serendipity. Be at the right place at the right time for the "dream job" to be handed to you. While this works often enough to be a reportable job source, relying on it is like doing lifetime financial planning with lottery tickets.

Special thanks to the University of Minnesota Law School

300+ THINGS YOU CAN DO WITH A LAW DEGREE

Alternative Dispute Resolution

Arbitration Administrator
Arbitrator
Dispute Resolution Professional
Domestic Resolution Specialist
Hearing Officer
Mediator
Ombudsman

Civil Rights

Affirmative Action Officer
ADA Coordinator
ADA Compliance Manager
Children's Advocate
Civil Rights Analyst
Civil Rights Investigator
Conciliation Specialist
Director, Human Relations
Director, Human Resources & Cultural Diversity
Equal Opportunity Compliance Specialist
Equal Employment Opportunity Manager/Officer
Human Rights Administrator

Contract and Procurement

Contract Negotiator
Contract Specialist/Administrator/Officer
Contract Termination Specialist
Industrial Property Manager
Procurement Officer/Analyst
Purchasing Officer/Director

Court Administration

Assistant Circuit/District Executive for Legal Affairs
Bankruptcy Administrator
Bankruptcy Appeals Clerk/Work leader
Bankruptcy Case Administration Manager
Bankruptcy Examiner
Circuit/District Court Executive
Clerk of Court
Court Administrator
Court Analyst
Court Operations Specialist
Deputy Clerk
Disciplinary Administrator
Estate Administrator
Friend of the Court

Guardianship Clerk
Jury Commissioner
Land Commissioner
Legal Documents Officer/Supervisor
Legal Research Director
Parole Officer
Pretrial Services Officer
Probation Officer/Director
Registrar
Reporter of Decisions
Settlement Director
Supervisor of Public Trust Accounts
Support Payments Officer
Training Professional
Violations Bureau Manager

Criminal Justice

Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms Inspector
Asset Search/Information Investigator
Bank Fraud Investigator
Border Patrol Agent
Child Abuse Investigator
Civilian Complaint Review Board Officer
Compliance Support Inspector
Consumer Safety Inspector
Crime Analyst
Crime Prevention Coordinator
Criminal Investigation
Criminal Justice Administrator/Analyst
Customs Inspector
DEA Special Agent
Economic Crimes Investigator
Enforcement Professional
FBI Special Agent
Fines, Penalties and Forfeiture Specialist
Foreign Service Narcotics Control Officer
Forensic Investigator
Game Law Enforcement Officer
General Investigator/Inspector
Immigration Inspector
Inspector General
Investigations Review Specialist
Law Enforcement Specialist
Legal Investigator
Postal Inspector
Revenue Officer/Agent
Securities Fraud Examiner

Seized Property/Asset Management
Specialist

Special Agent (Wildlife)

Treasury Enforcement Agent

Victims Compensation Officer/Claims
Analyst

Education Administration

Assistant to the President/Chancellor

Director of Federal/State Relations

Grants and Contracts Manager

Judicial Affairs Officer

Laboratory Business manager

Law School Career Counselor

Law School Clinical Program Supervisor

Law School Development/Fundraising
Officer

Law School Director of Admissions

Law School Director of Alumni Affairs

Law School Director of Institutional
Advancement

Law School Director of Career Services

Law School Director of Continuing Legal
Education

Law School Director of Student Affairs

Director of Planned Giving

Technology Licensing Associate

Education Faculty

Law School Clinical Program Instructor

Law School Professor

Legal Research & Writing Program

Instructor

Paralegal Program Instructor

Undergraduate Business Ethics Teacher

Undergraduate Business Law Professor

Undergraduate Criminal Justice Program

Instructor

Undergraduate Environmental Policy
Teacher

Undergraduate Law and Anthropology
Professor

Undergraduate Law and History Professor

Undergraduate Law and Psychology
Professor

Undergraduate Law and Society Professor

Undergraduate Legal Studies Program
Coordinator

Undergraduate Legal Studies Program
Teacher

Undergraduate Security Assistance
Management Instructor

Undergraduate/Graduate Labor Relations
Instructor

Undergraduate/Graduate Tax Teacher

Energy

Energy Advocate

Energy Conservation Program Specialist

Energy Efficiency Officer

Gas Supply/Regulatory Affairs Professional

Mineral Appeals Analyst

Natural Resources Specialist

Public Utilities Specialist

Environmental Careers

Coastal Zone Resource Manager

Conservation Field Representative

Director of Environmental Affairs

Director, Legislative Analysis/Environmental
Policy

Environmental/Public Health Advocate

Environmental Compliance Manager

Environmental Policy Analyst

Environmental Protection Specialist

Hazardous Waste Management Consultant

Remediation Protection Specialist

Resource Policy Analyst

Safety and Occupational Health Specialist

Technological Program Hazards Specialist

Trade Association Environmental Staffer

Financial Services

Bank Investment Compliance Officer

Bank Probate Administrator/Officer

Bankruptcy Analyst

Benefits Professional

Claims/Settlement/Termination Specialist

Compliance Officer

(Commodities/Securities)

Consumer Affairs Examiner

Corporate Finance Executive

Credit Examiner

Financial Institution Examiner

Financial Services Sales Agent

Futures Trading Investigator

Investment Banking Officer

Legal Fee Auditor

Loan Administrator/Specialist

Loan Workout Officer

Pension Benefits Examiner

Pension Law Specialist

Probate Accountant

Public Finance Consultant
Securities Compliance Examiner
Securities Firm Executive
Securities Transactions Analyst
Trust Business Development Professional
Trust Employee Benefits Administrator
Trust Examiner
Trust Officer/Administrator
Trust Risk Analyst
U.S. Trustee/Assistant U.S. Trustee

Human Resources

Employee Benefit Plan Specialist
Employee Disability Programs Manager
Employee Relations Manager/Specialist
Government Benefits Director
Health Plan Member Services Coordinator
Lawyer Temporary Agency Manager
Legal Career Counselor
Legal Search Consultant
Manpower Development Specialist
Personnel Management Specialist
Public Guardian
Reemployment Rights Compliance Specialist
Retirement System Administrator
Salary Administration Specialist
Veterans Program Specialist

Insurance

Bankruptcy Claims Examiner
Civil Service Retirement Claims Examiner
Claims Representative/Manager
Dependent and Estates Claims Examiner
Document Compliance Specialist
Environmental Claims Specialist
Errors and Omissions Claims Manager
General Claims Examiner
Health Benefits Program Analyst
Health Care Policy Analyst
Health Plan Member Services Coordinator
Insurance Agent
Insurance Fraud Investigator
Litigation Examiner
Loss and Damage Claims Examiner
Pension Investigator
Personal Trust Product Manager
Risk Manager
Social Insurance Administrator/Representative
Social Insurance Claims Examiner

Transportation Claims Examiner
Unemployment Insurance Administrator
Veterans Claims Examiner
Workers' Compensation Claims Examiner
Workers' Compensation Program Specialist

International Affairs/Trade

Commercial Loan Specialist
Customs Entry and Liquidation Specialist
Economic Development Project Officer
Export Administrator
Export Control Specialist
Export Insurance Issuing Specialist
Foreign Affairs Officer
Foreign Service Officer
Foreign Trade Zone Manager
Import Compliance Specialist
International Agency Liaison Officer
International Relations Officer
International Trade Analyst/Specialist
Passport and Visa Examiner
Political Risk Insurance Officer
U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service Officer

Intellectual Property

Copyright Examiner
Intellectual Resource Director
Patent Administrator
Patent Examiner
Patentability Review Examiner
Patent/Technology Licensing Officer
Technology Transfer Director
Trademark Examiner
University Corporate Liaison Officer

Intelligence/National Security

Aviation Security Specialist/Officer
Foreign Assets Control Intelligence Analyst
Foreign Service Diplomatic Security Officer
Industrial Security Specialist/Officer
Information Security Specialist/Officer
Intelligence Officer
Intelligence Research Specialist
Internal Security Specialist/Officer
Personnel Security Specialist/Officer
Physical Security Specialist/Officer
Security Administration Specialist/Officer
Security Classification Specialist/Officer
Security Inspector

Labor Relations

Industrial Relations Manager/Specialist
Labor Investigator
Labor Management Relations Examiner
Labor Negotiator
Labor Relations Manager/Specialist/Analyst
Wage and Hour Law Administrator
Wage and Hour Law Compliance Specialist

Legal Administration

Bar Association Professional
CLE Training Manager/Specialist
Litigation Management Professional
Law Firm Administrator/Executive Director
Law Firm Management Consultant
Law Firm Recruiter
Legal Services Program Executive Director
Pro Bono Coordinator

Legal Documents/Information

Analyst in Social Legislation
Freedom of Information Act/Privacy Act
Officer
Law Librarian
Law Library Computer Network Manager
Legal Archivist
Legal Database Manager
Legal Instruments Examiner
Legal Researcher
Litigation Support Specialist

Legislation and Regulatory Affairs

Congressional Affairs Specialist
Governmental Affairs/Relations Positions
Legislative Analyst/Director
Legislative Assistant
Legislative Correspondent
Legislative Program Manager
Legislative Representative
Legislative Staff Director
Lobbyist
Manager of Regulatory Affairs
Policy Advocate
Policy Analyst
Regulations/Rulings Specialist
Regulatory Compliance Director
Regulatory Impact Analyst

Management

Acquisitions/Divestiture Professional
City/County Clerk/ Administrator

Elections Administrator Officer
Emergency Management Specialist
Foundation Executive/Program Manager
Grants Management Specialist
Management Analyst
Nonprofit Advocacy Organization Manager
Program Analyst/Officer
Trade/Professional Association Executive

Marketing

Bar Review Regional Director/Administrator
Director of Gift and Estate Planning
Economic Development Positions
(State/Municipal)
Franchise Development Manager
Law Firm Director of Client Relations
Law Firm Business Development Editor
Legal Cost Management Sales Consultant
Public Affairs Specialist

Miscellaneous

Advocacy Coordinator
Child Support Enforcement Case Analyst
Civil Penalties Officer
Corporate Secretary
Ethics Officer
Family Support Magistrate
Food Program Specialist
Hidden Assets Investigator
Internal Affairs Director (State/Local
Agencies)
Legal Fee Auditor/Legal Cost Specialist
License Examining Specialist
Municipal Code Enforcement Officer
Professional Licensing Board Compliance
Officer
Senior Paralegal
Small Business Advocate
Trade Specialist
Unclaimed Property Administrator/Officer

Publishing/Broadcasting

Acquisitions Editor
Legal Writer/Editor
Law Firm Business Development Editor
Law Correspondent/Reporter
Legal Newspaper/Journal Publisher
Legal Publisher Account
Representative/Executive
Technical Legal Information Specialist
Technical Writer/Editor (Law)

Real Estate/Housing

Director of Real Estate
Housing Advocate
Housing Authority Director/Professional
Housing Service Planner
Land Agent
Land Law Examiner
Land Preservation Director
Land Protection Director/Specialist
Real Estate Auction Project Manager
Realty Specialist/Officer
Tenant's Broker
Title Examiner
Zoning Administrator

Taxation

Estate Tax Examiner
International Tax Analyst
Property & Transaction Taxes Manager
Tax Law Specialist
Tax Manager/Tax Planning Manager
Tax Research Manager

Transportation

Ad measurer
Boating Law Administrator
Highway Safety Specialist
Marine Transportation Policy Analyst
Traffic Management Specialist
Vessel Traffic Specialist

Resources

There are a number of resources for students and alumni seeking information about alternative careers. The following resources are available in the Career Resources library and may be useful in a search for alternative career options.

Alternative Careers for Lawyers (available in the Resources Library)

Author Hillary Mantis

Published New York, NY: Princeton Review Publishing, 1997

Beyond LA Law: Break the Traditional Lawyer Mold (available in the Resources Library)

Author Janet Smith, Ed.

Published Harcourt Brace, 1998

Breaking Traditions: Work Alternatives for Lawyers (available in the Resources Library)

Published ABA Section of Law Practice Management, 1993

Changing Jobs: A Handbook for Lawyers in the 90's (available in the Resources Library)

Author Heidi McNeil (Ed.)

Published American Bar Association, 1994

Doors Open to Alternative Careers

Published Maryland Bar Journal, Maryland Bar Association, March-April 1992, p. 3-6

Federal Law-Related Careers Directory

Author Richard L. Hermann, Linda P. Sutherland, and Jeannette J. Sobjian (Eds.)

Published Washington, DC: Federal Reports, Inc., 1994

Full Disclosure: Do You Really Want to be a Lawyer? (out of print)

Author S.J. Bell

Published Chicago, IL: American Bar Association, 1992

J.D. Preferred, 400+ Things You Can Do With a Law Degree (Other Than Practice Law)

Published Washington, DC: Federal Reports, Inc., 1994

The Lawyer's Career Change Handbook (available in the Resources Library)

Author Hindi Greenberg

Published New York, NY: Avon Books, 1998

Lawyers in Transition: Planning a Life in the Law (available in the Resources Library)

Author M. Byers, D. Samuelson, and G. Williamson

Published Natick, MA: Barkley Company, Inc., 1988

Life After Law: Second Careers for Lawyers

Author M.A. Altman

Published Washington, D.C.: Wayne Smith Company, Inc., 1991

Non-Legal Careers for Lawyers, 3rd Ed. (available in the Resources Library)

Author Gary Munneke and William Henslee
Published American Bar Association, 1994

The Road Not Taken: A Practical Guide to Exploring Non-Legal Career Options
(available in the Resources Library)

Author K. Grant and W. Werner
Published Washington, DC: National Association for Law Placement,
1991

Running from the Law: Why Good Lawyers are Getting Out of the Legal Profession
(available in the Resources Library)

Author Deborah Arron
Published Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1991

Turning Points-New Paths & Second Careers for Lawyers (available in the Resources
Library)

Author G. Cain
Published American Bar Association Senior Lawyers Division, 1994

*What Can You Do With a Law Degree: A Lawyer's Guide to Career Alternatives Inside,
Outside & Around the Law*, 4th Ed. (available in the Resources Library)

Author Deborah Arron
Published Seattle, WA: Niche Press, 1999