



Boston College Law School Office of Career Services

I. OVERVIEW: WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL LAW?

Law students often wonder what the term “international law” means. It is an intriguing term, conjuring up visions of adventure in foreign lands or big deals that exemplify the global economy of the new millennium. In fact, “international law” is an umbrella term for extremely varied, and sometimes vastly different, types of legal practice.

A career in international law may be in the public sector or private sector. One may be employed by the U.S. government or a foreign corporation. The position may require proficiency in more than one language or solely English. International law encompasses virtually all substantive areas of law including, but not limited to: family, trust, tax, corporate, litigation, securities, trade, and intellectual property. One can practice international law in a variety of settings including, academia, corporate headquarters, governmental institutions, non-governmental organizations, and law firms.

The only factor common to all of the varied career paths included in the term “international lawyer” is that the career involves clients with a non-domestic interest or identity. Many practitioners of international law suggest that the best way to become an international lawyer is to become an excellent lawyer and then transfer those skills to the international arena. It is important to bear in mind that international law practitioners in the private sector may work at a domestic office of a firm or corporation handling matters involving international clients and entities, or a firm or corporation which is located overseas and handles cases involving questions of international law. These two situations require very different job search strategies.

In exploring the practice of international law, students should evaluate their priorities: Is the location of the practice or the substantive area of law more important? Most likely, it will be a combination of both. Would a case or two dealing with an international client or matter be satisfactory, or would practice in a different country using foreign language skills be more appealing? The attached information maybe as useful as you try to answer such questions.

II. HOW TO BEGIN THE SEARCH

Students seeking a career in international law are generally advised to gain some international experience and a working knowledge of a foreign language by the end of law school. Students can consider registering for foreign language courses at the university or at a language institute. Local term-time internships or summer positions abroad can also be useful experiences. The search for internships as well as summer or full time positions can be structured in one of two ways:

1) Explore interest by substantive area of international law:

- Identify organizations that specialize in the substantive area of law you wish to pursue. The most comprehensive and up-to-date resource for law firms is www.martindale.com. For Government and public interest or human rights positions, a good place to start is the web-based database, Public Service Law Network, found at PSLawNet.org.
- Join organizations or participate in activities that offer practical experience and help to build a network. These include: school organizations and law reviews, as well as national and international organizations such as the American Society of International Law Society (www.asil.org), the ABA Section of International Law (www.abanet.org/intlaw) and the International Law Students Association (www.ilsa.org). Also, identify individuals who can help give you a better idea of the elements of different types of practice. The greatest resources are other students, professors, alumni, and local practitioners. Networking is key, especially when seeking placement overseas. Talk to people who will inform you and perhaps introduce you to other practitioners in the field. The Alumni Career Network found on the Career Services website is a useful tool to begin to build your network. (<http://www.bc.edu/schools/law/services/career/alumni/careernetwork>)
- During upper class years, choose classes and research topics related to the area of substantive law in which you are interested. These academics experiences will make you more knowledgeable and help you to decide whether or not international law is really for you. Professors often share wisdom and contacts. Equally important, your work-products may be used in the future as writing samples when applying for summer and full-time positions.
- Explore existing grants, established summer internship programs, fellowships and study abroad programs in your desired substantive area of law in order to gain practical experience.
- The Career Services staff are helpful resources in your search for funding and useful resources to locate great opportunities.

2) Explore careers in international law by focusing on a desired destination:

Some students are interested in practicing in a particular geographic location. Consider the following to help with such a location-specific search.

- Become proficient in the language and become acquainted with the culture of the country in which you would like to practice. Read newspapers from that country, listen to radio programs, watch films, and talk to people who have lived and worked there
- Learn about the country's major industries and employment opportunities for foreigners. It is imperative to know if there exists a likelihood of finding a job in your desired locale.
- Be aware of licensing requirements in the country in which you will be looking. For example, will you be practicing American law in Paris or will you need admission to the French bar?
- Finally, explore existing summer grants and internships, fellowships, and study abroad programs in the country of choice. Practical experiences in that location may be as important to potential employers as your school record.