PROFESSIONALISM

Your reputation as an attorney began the moment you applied to law school. All of your activity, from the moment you decided to enter the legal profession, can and will be scrutinized by those who will be among your peers long after you have graduated and passed the bar exam.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY AND STUDENT CONDUCT

All students are expected to read, understand, and adhere to the Academic Policies and the Student Honor Code of the Law School as well as University Policies. The Academic Policies and Student Honor Code can be found in the hard-copy Student Planner and on the Law School Web site. University Policies can be found on the University Web site. Academic dishonesty, unprofessional conduct, and the misrepresentation of academic records and University and Law School activities are all examples of unacceptable behavior. If you engage in these activities while in school, you are jeopardizing your ability to complete your degree requirements for the School of Law, and to become a licensed attorney.

You should also be mindful of your conduct with your fellow students, professors, and school administrators. While the number of attorneys in California is large, the legal community is small. You may find yourself working with, for, or against a classmate in the future. Your professors are connected to the legal community, as are many of the administrators at the Law School. Your conduct and demeanor while at USF will be remembered. Common sense, civility, good manners, and respect should be exercised at all times.

CONDUCT WITH EMPLOYERS

Your conduct with employers will be a determining factor in your job search success as well as your opportunities for lateral moves or promotions down the road.

USF School of Law is a member of NALP, the National Association for Legal Career Professionals. To cultivate ethical practices and fairness in legal career counseling and planning, recruitment, employment, and professional development, NALP created guidelines for its member institutions. Students are expected to read, understand, and adhere to the NALP Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruitment Activities (outlined in the OCP handout NALP Principles and Standards). Students can also quickly consult NALP’s Student Professionalism During the Interview Season: A Quick Guide to Your Ethical Responsibilities in the Offer and Decision-Making Process (included in this handout). For the most current set of guidelines, go to www.NALP.org and click on the “Principles & Standards” menu.
1. **TREAT ALL COMMUNICATIONS AS FORMAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Once you have begun applying to legal employers, we recommend that you take the following steps:

a. Update your voice mail greeting to make sure that it sounds professional and clearly identifies you so that the caller knows with certainty that they have reached the correct telephone number.

b. Change to a conservative and professional sounding e-mail address such as: [firstname.lastname]@gmail.com, with a simple signature that includes contact information and no distracting quotes or other extraneous information.

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### E-mail Communication

E-mail communication has become an accepted mode of communication in the legal profession. Many law students have never used e-mail in a professional setting. Whether communicating with an employer’s recruiting staff, supervising attorneys, or clients, you must treat e-mail communication as a formal communication. Always include a standard business salutation (e.g., “Dear Mr./Ms.[Last Name]:”) and a complimentary close (“Sincerely,/Best regards.”). Don’t begin your e-mail with “Hi [First Name],” as it may be perceived as unprofessional and too casual for an applicant.

A copy of the NALP article entitled, *E-Professionalism Dos and Don’ts* is included in this handout and covers other topics related to professionalism in the digital and wireless age.

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### Voice Mail Communication

Make a favorable impression on a legal employer by following these simple steps when leaving a voice message:

1. State your name, slowly and clearly.
2. State your telephone number, slowly and clearly.
3. Repeat your telephone number, clearly.
4. If appropriate, also state your e-mail address, slowly and clearly.
5. Explain why you are calling.
6. Request the action that you would like from the person you are calling.
7. State your name again, thank the person, and hang up.

A well-crafted voice mail message allows the recipient to find what you need or take care of the situation before calling you back. Below are a few examples.

**Voice mail Example 1:**

Hello, this is Erin Grady, a student at USF School of Law. My telephone number is 5-5-5-5-5-5-5-5. Again that's, (555) 555-5555. You can also reach me by e-mail at [e-mail address]. I'm returning Ms. [Recruiting Director's] phone call. The
best times to reach me are [available hours]. Again, this is Erin Grady and I look forward to hearing from you. Thank you.

Voice mail Example 2:

Hello, my name is James Merriweather and I'm calling to check on the status of a job application that I submitted two weeks ago. I can be reached at 5-5-5-5-5-5-5. Again, that’s (555) 555-5555. You can also reach me via e-mail at [e-mail address]. Thank you for your time. Again, this is James Merriweather and I look forward to hearing from you.

2. RESPOND PROMPTLY

Get in the habit of regularly checking your voice mail and e-mail. You are expected to respond as soon as possible. Try to always respond on the same day that the message is received. If that is not possible you should respond no later than the next business day. If correspondence requires a lengthy response, you should, at the very least, acknowledge receipt immediately and give a timeline for a more detailed response.

If you know that you will not be able to respond to e-mail and/or voice mail for a period of time, make sure that you update your greeting on your voice mail, and create a “vacation” rule response for your e-mail account that, in simple terms, lets callers or writers know when you will be able to respond. Example: “Thank you for your message. I will not have access to this e-mail account from [Date] to [Date]. I will respond to your message upon my return.”

3. BE PUNCTUAL IN ALL THINGS

Plan to arrive at all interviews and events at least 15 minutes early. There is no such thing as arriving “fashionably late” to an interview. It is always a good idea to have a phone number to call in case you are running late, or experience an unexpected delay. Plan ahead and program that phone number into your mobile phone.

The same holds true for all events to which you are invited. Always arrive on time or a little early. If you are invited to attend an event, and an “RSVP” is requested, you are expected to reply to the invitation, even if you do not plan on attending. Not responding, or responding after the RSVP deadline, can be perceived negatively. If you indicate that you will be in attendance, you should make every effort to attend, and only cancel under exigent circumstances. Be sure to send a note or e-mail of apology if you cannot attend. This should be sent before the event if possible, or immediately after the event.

Punctuality also applies to work assignments and deadlines. Make sure that you meet all deadlines and communicate frequently with supervisors about expectations.
4. **HONOR YOUR COMMITMENTS**

Employers are investing time, resources, and potential revenue during the hiring process. Be mindful of this, and follow the guidance below:

- Don’t cancel interviews at the last minute or without cause.
- Don’t accept an interview scheduled at a time at which you know that you are unavailable, even if you intend to try to make yourself available.
- Don’t ask an employer to reschedule an interview due to a conflict that has arisen in your schedule.
- Don’t accept an offer of employment and then rescind that acceptance.

It is best not to accept an offer on the spot, especially if you are still weighing your options. Typically, an employer will send a written offer letter or e-mail which you will want to review prior to accepting. You should, however, respond to offers from judges/justices within 24 hours.

For additional guidance about employment offers and acceptance refer to the following documents, all of which are available on USFLawLink.com under “Resources.”

- *NALP Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruitment Activities*
- *Student Professionalism During the Interview Season: A Quick Guide to Your Ethical Responsibilities in the Offer and Decision-Making Process* (NALP)
- *Considering Offers of Employment: How to Accept or Decline* (OCP Handout)

5. **DRESS LIKE AN ATTORNEY…BUT NOT BETTER THAN AN ATTORNEY**

- **Proper Fit.** Make sure that your clothing fits properly. Don’t be afraid to receive a consultation from a professional at a department or specialty store; many offer free consultations. Professional shoppers can work within your budget, make sure that your clothing fits you properly, and help you select items that are appropriate for your work setting.

- **Good Condition.** Clothes should not be frayed, stained or smell (the usual culprit is cigarette smoke). Fabrics should be pressed and ironed. Shoes should be polished.

- **Conservative.** You do not want to be remembered for your outfit or your accessories. Choose conservative color schemes, limit your jewelry, and carefully consider whether you think it is appropriate to don an Armani suit or Rolex. An interview is not the time to display high fashion. You want to dress like the attorneys with whom you will be interviewing, but you do not want to outdo them, or look like you don’t need the job because of your designer suit or watch.
• **Piercings and Tattoos.** You will ultimately be representing your employer, and working with other attorneys and clients. Keeping that in mind, it is probably best to remove visible body piercings (with the exception of earrings for women), and cover, if possible, all tattoos.

• **Cologne, Perfume and Makeup.** If you must apply it, use it sparingly. Some individuals have heightened sensitivity to fragrances. The safest approach is to skip it for the interview. Makeup should be applied conservatively. Consider getting a consultation if you are worried about appropriate application.

• **Gum and Mints.** Make sure your teeth are clean and your breath is fresh, but stop chewing gum and mints before an interview, and use them with caution during social events.

• **Facial Hair and Hair Length and Color.** For men, clean shaven is the safer approach. Otherwise, facial hair must be neatly trimmed. Hair styles should be conservative and tidy for both men and women, and length should be on the shorter side for men. If used, hair coloring should be conservative and unnoticeable.

• **Business Professional vs. Business Casual.** When interviewing, you should always wear business professional clothing. For most social events (which often occur after the normal work day) business professional and business casual are appropriate. Business casual is usually not as casual as most assume. It is normally just a slight step down from business professional attire. Don’t be afraid to ask for guidance from a professional or the Office of Career Planning.

6. **RESPECT YOUR ELDERS…AND EVERYONE ELSE, ESPECIALLY STAFF**

There are several generations still active in the workforce. At a firm or other legal employer, you will find a mix of these generations, each with their own expectations based upon their varied life experiences.

Even if an employer has a reputation for having a “relaxed” atmosphere, err on the side of caution, and address everyone by “Mr.” or “Ms.” until you are given permission to address that individual by his or her first name.

Be deferential in your dealings with attorneys, from the most senior, to the most junior, and respect constraints on their busy schedules. Expect them to offer short, often terse replies to inquiries. Be mindful of the effect of interruptions on their productivity, and avoid creating additional work for them. Even responding to what you perceive as a simple e-mail requires the attorney to give up precious time in an already busy schedule.

When dealing with support staff, remember that they are specialists in what they do, and treat them with respect. It is foolish to lose a job opportunity because you were rude to a secretary. Be nice, make an effort to remember their names, and remember that they
probably have many more years of experience than you. In their book, *The Modern Rules of Business Etiquette*, authors Donna and David Gerson offer the following advice:

> From the managing partner to the filing room clerk, every single person deserves to be treated with respect. The sign of a true lady or gentleman lies in the ability to treat every single person with the same level of deference, regardless of rank. Everyone deserves direct eye contact, a smile, and a handshake.

### 7. BEHAVE LIKE A PROFESSIONAL, BUT NOT ALWAYS LIKE AN ATTORNEY

Remember, your behavior will be observed at all times, even during social events.

- **Alcohol.** You will find yourself at events where attorneys are drinking and even intoxicated. While it is probably OK to enjoy one cocktail or one glass of wine, it is not OK for you to become intoxicated. It is fine to mirror the activity of your peers, but not necessarily their behavior. If it would feel awkward to not have a drink in hand, you can try the following:
  - Order a drink, and simply sip it for a good long while.
  - Ask for a sparkling water, or club soda with lime as a suitable “mocktail” substitute for a gin and tonic.

  Sodas, water, and other soft drinks are fine options. You will probably not be questioned about your choice of beverage. If you are driving, no one should question your decision to not drink. While on the subject of drinking, here is an additional tip: hold the drink in your left hand to avoid having a “clammy” handshake.

- **Humor and Jokes.** Tread carefully here. If you are not a natural joke teller it is probably best to avoid an unsuccessful attempt at humor. If you do tell jokes, avoid obscene and lewd subject matter and the topics of race, religion, politics, gender, and sexual orientation.

- **Profanity.** Some attorneys will use profanity when speaking with you. You do not need to follow their example, and you should NEVER use profanity while in an interview situation.