CONDUCTING AN EFFECTIVE JOB SEARCH

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

You may find it helpful to formulate your career goals once you have read the OCP handout Employment Options and Resources which summarizes the various types of legal employment available. Once you have clarified your career goals, you can begin to develop a strategy to locate the type of employment that interests you. OCP is also happy to assist you in formulating your “Job Search Action Plan.” A general action plan worksheet is included in OCP’s Job Search Action Plan handout.

Your job search is an on-going process. Keep in mind the following points during all stages of the process:

- Few people ever find their dream job right out of law school.
- Be realistic in your search. Many students waste time, money, and effort contacting employers who are not likely to hire them.
- Be persistent and do not get discouraged. Rejection is a part of the process; however, with perseverance and follow-up, you can be successful. After all, it only takes one positive response.

To plan your search strategy, focus your efforts in a way that contributes to your career goals. The most common focus points for students are the following:

- Employer type
- Employer size
- Practice area
- Geographic location

Be careful not to overly restrict your efforts when using the factors listed above (i.e. searching only for private criminal defense firms in San Mateo County). Additionally, given the current state of the economy, expanding your search to include areas outside of the Bay Area is encouraged, especially if you have ties to another area. OCP’s Interview Skills handout has a list of questions to consider asking when evaluating employers to determine whether the employer meets the criteria important to you. Later in this section is a list of resources and strategies to assist you in planning your search.
TIMING YOUR JOB SEARCH

The timing of a job search and the correlating job search activities will depend on the type of employer you are considering and your year in school. The following guidelines are based on typical student experiences from previous years. Make an appointment with an OCP Director and/or contact the potential employer directly for specifics and current information.

1. FIRST YEAR:

- **LARGE FIRMS.** Pursuant to guidelines from the National Association for Legal Professionals (NALP), NALP member firms do not, and should not, begin to consider 1Ls until after December 1. Therefore, time your applications so that they arrive on December 1. Some firms may wait to make decisions until students receive their first semester grades in January or February. Additionally, firms hire 1Ls depending upon the economy and whether the firm has filled all their 2L summer associate slots.

- **SMALL/MID-SIZED FIRMS.** Some smaller firms may begin to look in the fall, but smaller firms will look in the spring semester for summer clerks and even continue to do so into the summer.

- **CORPORATIONS.** Similarly, corporations who hire students to work in their legal departments over the summer generally do not hire students until the spring semester or summer.

- **COURTS.** Most judges, especially federal court judges, hire students for summer externships from late fall to December and early January. Federal judges in the Bay Area have agreed to wait for first semester grades.

- **PUBLIC INTEREST/PUBLIC SECTOR.** While some public interest organizations and government agencies may begin to look in the fall, most will hire early in the spring semester for summer positions, some as early as January. Winter break is an excellent time to start applying for public interest/public sector positions. Some coveted government positions have deadlines in December, such as the U.S. Attorney’s Office in San Francisco.

2. SECOND YEAR:

- **LARGE FIRMS.** Generally, large private firms recruit summer associates in late summer and early fall of the second year. Recruitment usually ends by early December. Much of this recruitment occurs during the Fall On-Campus Interview season which takes place at USF in late August to September.

- **SMALL/MID-SIZED FIRMS.** Small firms hire as needed. Some firms may begin to look in the fall, but start hiring spring semester for summer clerks and may even continue hiring into the summer.
- **LEGAL/JUDICIAL EXternships.** Students interested in pursuing an academic year externship with a judge, non-profit organization, or government agency during their third, fourth or fifth semesters in law school should contact the Externship Coordinator in the Externship Programs office early in the semester prior to the externship at externships@usfca.edu.

- **PUBLIC INTEREST/PUBLIC SECTOR.** While some public interest organizations and government agencies may begin to hire throughout the fall semester, many will hire early in the spring semester for summer positions. Note that the federal government honors programs typically have a deadline in early September, usually after the Labor Day weekend.

3. **THIRD YEAR:**

- **LARGE FIRMS.** Large private firms generally recruit new associates in late summer and early fall of the third year. Large firms tend to recruit through the Fall On-Campus Interview Program. However, fewer employers recruit 3Ls, as there are fewer positions available.

- **SMALL/MID-SIZED FIRMS.** Some smaller firms may begin to look in the fall, but most small firms will look in the spring, summer, and sometimes after the bar exam is taken or results are in for entry-level positions.

- **JUDICIAL CLERKS**hships. Applications deadlines for judicial clerkships for after graduation vary greatly among federal judges and from state to state. Many federal judges use OSCAR, the Online System for Clerkship Application and Review, to accept applications. Deadlines are typically in early September after Labor Day weekend. Students who are interested in pursuing a judicial clerkship should contact OCP in their second year.

- **GOVERNMENT.** Some government agencies hire post-graduate positions through the “Honors Program,” which generally have application deadlines in the fall of the third year (typically in early September, after Labor Day weekend). Most other agencies, however, hire for permanent positions in the spring or later (after budgets are passed and/or bar results are in).

- **PUBLIC INTEREST FELLOWSHIPS.** Many public interest-minded students pursue post-graduate fellowships as an entryway to permanent public interest positions. Fellowship deadlines fall throughout the academic year, although a number of prominent fellowship programs have early fall application deadlines. The majority of direct hiring by public interest organizations occurs in response to need, with a spring hiring season.

Remember, an essential step in your job search is to speak with an OCP Director to discuss personalized search strategies.
RESOURCES

1. THE OFFICE OF CAREER PLANNING:

The first and easiest step in planning your search strategy is to make an appointment with an OCP Director. Letting OCP know what area of law and/or what setting you are interested in will allow OCP to assist you in developing a strategy. While the office maintains an open-door policy, students are encouraged to make appointments. Try to attend as many OCP programs and networking events as possible. These provide you an opportunity to talk to attorneys (often USF alumni) and make professional contacts that may be an invaluable resource for your job search.

2. JOB LISTINGS:

OCP receives many listings from various types of employers soliciting candidates to fill positions either during the school year, summer or upon graduation. Students can view these listings on USFLawLink.com. You will need to enter your login name and password that OCP will provide.

Other resources in OCP also contain job listings, including the Job Search Resources handout. A few additional online job-listing resources are:

- StudentJobsOnline available online through Westlaw that contains government and other positions nationwide. If you have a Westlaw account, you access it by going to http://lawschool.westlaw.com.

- PSJD (www.psjd.org) lists public interest and public sector jobs nationwide.

- The Recorder and the Daily Journal are the main legal newspapers in the Bay Area and in California and they contain listings mainly for graduate positions. Job listings are in print and on www.lawjobs.com and www.dailyjournal.com. Copies of both newspapers are available in the Law Library, and copies of The Recorder are available in OCP.

3. TAPPING INTO THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET:

The hidden job market refers to positions that may exist but are not advertised. Students must take active steps to tap into this market and promote themselves to employers. An effective way to do this is by networking and conducting informational interviews. Each year, many students get their summer positions and even their permanent positions through their own outreach and networking efforts. See the OCP handouts How to Network and Informational Interviewing for more detailed information on how to engage in your outreach efforts.
**SOME RESOURCES FOR CONDUCTING EMPLOYER OUTREACH:**

- The NALP Employer Directory is online at [www.nalpdirectory.com](http://www.nalpdirectory.com) and in print in OCP.
- The Martindale-Hubbell legal directory is available online at [www.martindale.com](http://www.martindale.com) and through Lexis.
- PSJD, [www.psjd.org](http://www.psjd.org), includes a searchable database of 11,000+ public interest and public sector legal employers.
- Websites such as [www.findlaw.com](http://www.findlaw.com), [www.hg.org](http://www.hg.org) (a worldwide legal directory), [www.craigslist.com](http://www.craigslist.com), and [www.indeed.com](http://www.indeed.com).
- The Recorder, Daily Journal, The American Lawyer, [www.law.com](http://www.law.com), and other publications that provide information on the legal market, firms and other employers.
- Networking (see section below on resources and tips to network.)

OCP updates its resources periodically, so stop by the office to check out new resources available to assist you in your search.

**TAKING ACTION**

The single most important step in your search is moving forward and taking action. You can do this in many ways. Below are some of the most effective ways.

1. **SELF-DIRECTED SEARCH:**

   You alone are responsible for deciding what your ideal job is and in taking action to obtain it. Of course, we are here to assist you in any way we can, but ultimately the task lies with you. Consequently, the self-directed search method is by far the most effective job search strategy for most students. Self-directed search simply means that you target employment opportunities suited to your lifestyle and long-term goals.

   Your self-directed search should begin with:

   - discussing your goals with an OCP Director and developing a personalized strategy;
   - responding to current job listings and available positions;
   - participating in some of the other activities listed below; and, most importantly,
   - pursuing opportunities that exist in the hidden job market.
2. ON-CAMPUS INTERVIEW PROGRAM (OCI):

Law firms, corporations, government agencies, and public interest organizations recruit at the law school each year for full-time, summer, and permanent positions with their organizations. These employers interview on campus for their offices throughout California and other major legal centers.

FALL OCI

Fall OCI is for second, third, and fourth year students. OCI is a 100% prescreen system. Employers select students for interviews. Hiring criteria and employer descriptions are made available to you for research. As academic performance is generally one of the most important factor for success with some of the employers in this program, particularly the large firms, be realistic when preparing your submissions. However, public sector employers and small to mid-sized firms have different hiring criteria and tend to look at the whole person, taking into account interest, drive, passion and previous accomplishments. OCP may be able to assist you with respect to historical hiring information for some employers. Please remember that, although OCI is highly visible, given the competitive nature of the program, most students do not obtain their jobs through this process.

3. OFF-CAMPUS INTERVIEWS - JOB FAIRS AND CONFERENCES:

OCP receives information regarding off-campus interviews, typically conducted at job fairs or conferences held in various cities. Students are encouraged to attend these events and should contact OCP for more information about participating employers, the application procedures, and possible funding opportunities.

4. VOLUNTEERING:

Volunteering can be an extremely effective way to get a permanent paying position. A volunteer position can give you the legal experience necessary to compete in today’s legal market. It is also a great way to meet potential employers and other contacts. There are several ways to volunteer at various agencies. The following are places or people you can contact for volunteer opportunities:

- **The Law Student Pro Bono Project.** For more information, see [www.lawstudentprobono.org](http://www.lawstudentprobono.org).

- **Public Interest Agencies.** These agencies generally do not have the funds to pay students to work, but offer extremely valuable legal experience. Students are encouraged to find their own funding through scholarships or grants.
Government Agencies. Many government agencies do not have the budgets to hire students and welcome qualified volunteers. It is also becoming more prevalent for government offices to hire for permanent positions through their previous interns and clerks. Some agencies rarely hire entry-level attorneys, but, when hiring, consider past clerking experience with them or other government entities to be valuable experience.

Local Bar Associations. Attend local bar or specialty bar association events to gain exposure to attorneys in practice areas of your interest. Additionally, consider volunteering to assist at such events. Not only will you get to attend free, but by having a specific role, attorneys will notice you, appreciate your commitment, and remember you in the future.

Summer Judicial Externships. For opportunities with judges, see an OCP Director for more information.

5. NETWORKING THROUGH INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWING:

In a tight employment market or during a difficult time to find a job such as the first year summer, it is important to use your network to supplement other job search strategies. Networking, essentially, is an educational process. It provides you access to information, advice, direction and opportunities. In addition, networking may help you circumvent the human resources department or recruiting office whose job it is to screen out hundreds of applicants.

A viable network does not require lawyers in the family or as friends; it simply requires a creative analysis of the circles of people in and around your life, past and present, and then bringing them on board to assist in your job search. The key is to make anyone and everyone you know aware of what you are looking for in employment.

IDENTIFYING YOUR NETWORKS. General considerations for network candidates include people, present and past, in your academic, employment and personal circles. Think about contacting alumni from your law, graduate, undergraduate or high schools, professors, teachers, former employers, and other professionals who may know lawyers.

HOW TO CONDUCT INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS. An informational interview is not a formal interview for a job, but an educational meeting where you obtain internal information about a particular employer or area of law to enable you to develop a specific plan for job search success. You can make your initial by e-mail, letter, or phone. Most lawyers are happy to provide guidance and information, but they want to work with a person with some focus. Thus, if you request an informational interview, do your research and come prepared to explain your interests.

You can begin by asking any of the above sources whether they can identify a person who may know someone who is doing what you want to do. The next step is to
contact that person for an informational interview. See the *Informational Interviewing* handout for additional information.

### Typical Informational Interview Questions

- What are your responsibilities?
- What is involved in a typical day?
- How did you come to this position?
- What do new people to this field typically do?
- What led you to this particular field?
- What do you know now that would have been helpful earlier in your career?
- What do you like/dislike about your job?
- What kind of advice can you give me about starting my career in this field?
- Can you refer me to anyone who may talk to me about this field?

Remember, you are interviewing to gain valuable insight. The point of informational interviewing is to gain additional contacts to expand your understanding of the field and to build your network. If the contact is a referral, only use her name if you have received permission to do so.

For guidance on drafting correspondence requesting informational interviews, see the *Cover Letters and Other Job Search Correspondence* handout. For more detailed information on networking and informational interviewing please see the *How to Network and Informational Interviewing* handouts.

### CONCLUSION

A job search can be a job in itself and is most effective when conducted through a multi-faceted approach. Depending on the market, your personal preferences and skills in marketing yourself, some approaches will work better than others will and it is important you utilize all job search techniques available to you.

Remember that the Office of Career Planning is here to help you. Take advantage of the knowledge and expertise available in our office and stop by to make an appointment to create your personalized “Job Search Action Plan.”