

Learning from the Class of 1997

Every spring, the YLS Career Development Office surveys YLS alumni five years after graduation for information regarding their post-law school careers. The information drawn from our graduates' experiences is enormously helpful to CDO in developing programs and providing counseling for current students.

In Spring 2002, 62% of the Class of 1997 responded to CDO's annual survey. What follows is some of the information gleaned from those responses.

Kelly J. Voight

Director of Private Sector
Counseling and Programs
Career Development Office

A Look Back

After graduation, 47% of respondents served as judicial law clerks, 38% went to law firms, 8% to public service employers, 3% to corporations, and 2% to academia. After including the first non-clerkship job of these graduates, 66% of the Class ended up in law firms, 21% with public service employers, 7% in academia, and 4% in business.

Where Are They Now?

On average, graduates from the Class of 1997 changed jobs 1.8 times in the five years since graduation (not including judicial clerkships). As a result of these shifts, fewer graduates now work for law firms (54%) and more work in the public sector (24%). The corporate and academic worlds share the remaining members of the class, with 10% working in each sector. Although law firm practitioners are divided equally among men and women, men dominate the academic and corporate fields,

comprising 85% and 90% respectively. In contrast, two-thirds of those employed in the public sector are women.

Who's Happy and Who's Not?

On the whole, 35% of respondents indicated that they are "very satisfied" with their current work. But some are clearly happier than others: 100% of academics reported being "very satisfied," compared with only 15% of those working in law firms.

Driving Force

What motivates so many of our graduates to work in large law firms, despite lower job satisfaction? One factor is money. Forty percent of respondents reported that educational debts affected their career choices. (At graduation, 73% of respondents had a debt burden of more than \$25,000; 41% had more than \$75,000 in debt.) Many respondents commented that the Law School's Career Options Assistance Program (COAP) has been enormously helpful. But even with COAP, many feel compelled to accept higher-paying positions. This is not to say that our graduates are at law firms only for the money: many graduates commented that law firms provide excellent training and mentoring for lawyers just starting their careers.

Looking Forward

The survey responses highlight areas where CDO can provide education and guidance to current students, on topics such as the realities of legal practice and educational debt management strategies. In addition, the survey results suggest that YLS and the legal community should continue to explore avenues to improve loan forgiveness programs so that students can choose careers based on their interests—not their debt. ∞

NOTE All percentages cited represent percentages of total respondents. Although 62% of the Class completed a survey, not all respondents answered every question.

YLS Graduates Seeking Law Teaching Positions

Graduates thinking about entering the law teaching market should request an informational packet by emailing teacherplacement.law@yale.edu. They should also contact Associate Dean Barbara Safriet before June 15, 2003, at Yale Law School, PO Box 208215, New Haven, CT 06520-8215; telephone 203 432-1685; fax 203 432-7362; email barbara.safriet@yale.edu.

The American Association of Law Schools (AALS) also sends a Faculty Appointments Register—a collection of standardized biographical forms and

résumés—to deans of all member schools several times each fall. The deadline for inclusion in the first distribution is early August. To register, contact AALS directly at 1201 Connecticut Avenue, NW, Suite 800, Washington, D.C. 20036-2605; telephone 202 296-8851; fax 202 296-8869; email aals@aals.org; website www.aals.org, and request Faculty Recruitment Services information.

The annual AALS Teacher Placement Conference will be held in Washington, D.C., on October 23-25, 2003.