



Merging Lanes on the legal road

Law students - are you aware of how your university education can impact your future career?

While the contemporary world has broadened the appeal of a law degree many law students are unaware of prospective opportunities on graduation.

This article shares practical tips for those transitioning from university to the workforce, gleaned from employers exhibiting at this year's LIV Legal Careers Fair.

Do good marks or extensive volunteering take precedence?

Do you struggle to balance university studies with extra-curricular activities and question what potential employers prefer? Exhibitors recommended mooting, studying abroad and helping at a legal clinic throughout university as ways to cultivate essential skills required to practise law. Top tier client based firms acknowledged the importance of academic achievements combined with a range of experiences which help graduates interact with clients.

One lawyer stressed that both volunteering and working throughout university are important "even at Maccas or Woolies as this shows a level of commitment and dedication as well as the ability to work with others."

The key message? Accumulating transferable skills is essential and activities outside the parameters of law studies will ultimately help in the advancement of a legal career.

Are there any desirable university subjects?

Too much choice and not enough guidance about university subjects? Students should aim to gain a head start in areas that employers deem advantageous. Many firms suggested choosing university subjects that relate to practice areas at students' desired firms, for example family law, non adversarial justice and social justice. This demonstrates both interest and knowledge of relevant areas of law. Students should attempt to gain knowledge in growing practice areas such as intellectual property allowing fresh perspectives and opportunities. Commercial law firms cited tax and competition subjects as a practical way to gain added knowledge.

Contemporary issues such as globalisation and the Asian Century have resulted in some firms citing languages and international law subjects as beneficial. One lawyer explained that "understanding the language and culture of countries such as China and India is imperative in the global climate." Additionally, a good grasp of Australia's regional neighbours and current human rights issues could also be of great assistance.

Many exhibitors encouraged students to study subjects and areas that they enjoy to ensure they continue to remain interested and passionate about the law.

Is it more valuable to have specific expertise or sufficient general understanding and ability?

Unsure if you should gain extensive experience in a specific niche or pursue a broader knowledge base? Smaller law firms engaged in general practice recommended potential employees expose themselves to a variety of legal areas to be equipped for many different clients and scenarios. This can be contrasted with some large commercial firms that are more specialised and value knowledge of developing commercial areas.

A broad spectrum of knowledge is pivotal if looking to work in rural law firms. Regional law firms acknowledged that their lawyers are "often thrown in the deep end and gain a lot of experience in a relatively short amount of time." The nature of working with remote and small communities results in lawyers not needing to specialise in a discreet area of law, rather acquiring knowledge in various areas such as criminal and family law.

Common to all exhibitors, however, was a belief that all potential employees need to "be open to learning new things" and to "learning on the job."

LEAPING FROM UNIVERSITY INTO A LEGAL CAREER CAN BE DAUNTING. THE LIV LEGAL CAREERS FAIR ALLOWS STUDENTS TO SEEK GUIDANCE FROM PEOPLE WORKING IN DIVERSE LEGAL AND NON-LEGAL ROLES.

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Are team work or leadership skills more highly valued?

Do you prefer to take charge or follow direction? While being a team player and following instructions seems to contradict the nature of a natural born leader, many exhibitors acknowledged the importance of both skill sets. A few firms mentioned that having the ability to follow instructions and work under the guidance of others is crucial, especially in the early stages of a law career. The larger firms explained that working in teams is necessary for efficiency and good communication.

Other firms outlined that leadership qualities fostered creative thinking and initiative which is essential in the fast paced legal field. Forward thinking was a quality many exhibitors felt was important in the unpredictable world of legal practice.

A human resources officer present at the careers fair commented that "the ability to fuse leadership skills and team work is favourable." Lawyers should possess the ability to work well in a team as well as in a leadership position.

Tips and tricks

Many law students and graduates who attended the careers fair provided helpful insights and key questions to ask exhibitors.

- Take a show bag for information on a variety of legal opportunities.
- Arrive at the exhibit early with a list of pre-prepared questions to ask exhibitors – tailored questions show interest and make the meeting more effective.
- Attend the careers session and mock interviews – it is a rare chance to get feedback on your interviewing style and to ask questions of potential future employers.
- Embrace the worthwhile networking opportunity.

The prospect of entering the workforce can be overwhelming and leave students feeling uneasy. Simple advice and support can ensure that the transition is made easier for students. The careers fair provides opportunity to gain exposure to the law beyond university so that graduates enter the workforce feeling more prepared for the exciting opportunities that lie ahead. ■

SHAYNA BART is an arts/law student at Monash University and member of the YLS Editorial Committee.

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