

## 3L and the City > column



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### The job hunt in a competitive legal market

**J**ob. That word, that one little word, sends my heart racing.

Whether one of my relatives asks me about my job hunt or one of my law school peers brings up his or her job hunt, the word “job” immediately stresses me out.

As if the transition from academics to the marketplace won’t be daunting enough, I find myself facing an even greater challenge: the job hunt.

Whenever I meet someone new and I tell them I am in my last semester of law school, they almost always ask where I will be working after graduation.

That’s when I start to feel the anxiety kicking in. The truth is that my job hunt is in limbo. I applied to the large law firms and federal jobs back in September.

The larger employers can still afford to plan to hire more than a year in advance.

But unfortunately, the smaller firms and smaller government agencies cannot afford to hire someone now and hold the position until October.

In fact, a lot of the job postings I see state that they won’t even consider applications unless the applicant is already licensed.

That means that not only will my job search not get serious until October, but I might not even get a job until 2014.

It’s a hard concept to explain, especially to those who are not in the legal field.

Most of my nonlaw schools friends think that all law students have high-paying jobs waiting for them as soon as they pass the bar.

And to be honest, even though I’ve known that the legal market is difficult, I still picture myself having a job by the time I graduate from law school.

About 99 percent of the 3Ls I talk to also don’t have a job yet. In fact, my career counselor told me that only about one-third of law students today have a job lined up by graduation.

On one hand, it comforts me that I am not alone in this and that it’s the market and not me. But, on the other hand, it frightens me that the market is still in such bad shape.

I do have a few friends who do actually have jobs already lined up and I couldn’t be happier for them.

But I would be lying if I didn’t say that every time a friend tells me that he or she got a job, it reminds me of how far I am from finding one.

Every now and then I will hear of a small- or medium-size law firm that is looking for entry-level attorneys and is able to hold the position open for a few months while the person graduates and takes the bar exam.

But, as can you imagine, because those positions are rare, they are pretty competitive. So while one of my peers may get a job before graduation, the rest of us continue to wait until we have our licenses and can be hired in October.

A lot of people, both within and outside of the legal profession, have offered me a number of different ideas for getting a job.

And with employers receiving dozens of resumes, it is a good idea to do something creative that will make you stand out.

The No. 1 piece of advice I’ve heard the most is to network and make connections.

Unfortunately, this can be one of the most awkward things to do. But I have found that networking alongside one of my peers definitely makes it easier.

Another piece of advice I’ve heard is to look for a job that does not necessarily require a J.D. or an attorney license.

In fact, a number of my peers do not plan on practicing and are looking for these kinds of jobs.

Others say that they wouldn’t mind a position that does not require a J.D., because they would be just so relieved to have a job at all. But I know that most of my peers, including myself, went to law school to be practicing attorneys and will be disappointed to do something else.

Personally, I want to work in public interest. Specifically, I want to work in environmental public interest law. My dream job would be to work as an attorney for an environmental nonprofit or government agency.

And I would still really enjoy working in a different kind of public interest position or for an environmental law firm.

But I am realistic enough to know that my first job may be in a very different area of law. And I am OK with that.

There are so many different interesting areas of law. Even if it’s not an area of law that particularly interests me, I would still dedicate myself to it.

And, although a lot of my extracurricular activities and internships have been in the environmental law field, I don’t think this narrows my chances at finding a job in another area. Rather, I hope it helps better differentiate me from the pool of graduating generalists.

Even with all of these issues, I try to keep a positive outlook on the whole situation.

And even though I am in this weird limbo, I know it’s important to stay active in my job search. So I continue to check job postings, network and try to keep my name out there.

I know I’ll land on my feet eventually, even if it takes longer than I’d planned, because that’s what hunters do — they adapt. ■

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