

Student Life # 1: Choosing Where to Article

1. When should I start thinking about what I want in a law firm? Try to think about what you want throughout your schooling. Although graduating from law school tends to be an end-objective for many law students, some firms (such as ours) guarantee articles for our summer students. Selecting the right firm for your summer placement and articles can force decisions that you might have thought could be put off for another year.

2. What factors should I consider in choosing a law firm? There are so many options available in the practice of law that deciding where you want to go and what type of law you wish to practice can be a daunting task. Don't worry too much about "having all of the answers" early on. Many lawyers do not expect this from you when you start looking for articles. We recognize that, for most students, many practice decisions cannot be made until you actually start working in a firm, as the practice of law is different from the study of law.

Type of Law. That being said, factors to consider in planning your legal career obviously include the areas of law. Are there a few areas that are of particular interest to you? If you want to focus in on two or three key areas, then the combined availability of those areas of practice in a given firm might limit the choices available. If you simply have not narrowed it down, you may wish to consider working in a full service law firm, so you can gain practical experience in many different areas.

Size of firm. Another consideration is the size of firm in which you want to work. There are pros and cons to working at firms of various size. A large, full service firm could expose you to a more diverse

range of legal service offerings, whereas a small firm could provide you with greater "hands on" experience. There may be more work related amenities and services in a large firm, while a small firm could be more transparent.

Remember, however, these stereotypes only hold true for so long. Do not always assume that because a firm is large, you will not get good "hands on" experience – often that will depend on the area of law in which you practice. Similarly, do not assume that you won't have exposure to many different areas in a smaller firm. Lawyers at smaller firms can be generalists, such that you could work in many areas of the law.

There also tends to be a perception in the marketplace that it is easier to move from a large firm to a smaller firm -- and more difficult to move from a small firm into a larger firm – after your articles. We are certain that there are many different views on whether this perception is true. For the record, we have found that this is not a significant consideration when hiring associates who have worked at other firms. We have hired lawyers who articulated at both small and large firms, as we recognize both environments can provide excellent training.

Beyond Articles. You should also consider what your career at a firm would be like after articles. If you stay at a firm, how are you placed in a specific practice? Does the firm have a specific program to ensure your legal training continues when you are an associate? If you do not stay at the firm, will the lawyers help you find another position? Like many law firms, we hire students as if we are hiring future partners. We make a tremendous investment in our people and we are happy

to discuss with our prospective students what they can expect beyond their articles.

Process of Elimination. In order to try to narrow down the options available to you, you may wish to consider whether there is anything you do not want to do -- use the process of elimination. Is there a city or a size of firm to which you do not want to go? Is there a type of law that you definitely do not want practice? It is often easier to answer these questions and, in so doing, you could narrow the field considerably.

Don't base too much on stereotypes. Do your homework! There are many stereotypes with respect to the type of work and experiences articulated students have, particularly stemming from the size of a firm. Some are truth, some fiction. The best way to gauge the personality of a firm is to do your research – review websites, talk to your law school's recruitment coordinators, speak to your friends who have articulated – and meet as many people from the firm as you can. Go to the Wine & Cheese and Open House events organized by your law school. These events are for your benefit and provide you with an excellent opportunity to gather information.

3. What courses should I take in law school to secure good articles? There are several things to consider in choosing your courses in law school, the most important of which is: what classes do I find interesting? While there are always some exceptions to this rule, do not focus on classes in which you have no interest simply because you think they are “lawyerly”; it could be the first step in a long, but unhappy, “lawyerly” career in which you have little interest.

If you have a specific area of interest, you should investigate what classes will help you build on that. Professors and law

school staff can provide guidance in this regard. Lawyers who practice in that specific area can also be of help.

There are several “black letter” law courses which are valuable to take in school, simply because they arise in many different areas of legal practice. Some of these, such as contracts and torts, are required courses. Others, such as administrative law, trusts, and tax, are not. The real benefit to taking these types of courses in law school is that they provide you with a grounding in key substantive matters which may be difficult – albeit not impossible – to obtain later in your career.

Another consideration in law course selection is your grades. As you all know, law firms will look at your grades in determining whether to give you an articling interview. If you are a better paper writer than exam writer, work some interesting paper-based classes into your schedule; do the reverse if you prefer exams. Balance your course load as best as you can so as not to be overwhelmed in one particular term. Play your strengths.

That being said, do not take any classes – regardless of interest – because you think you will earn a good grade. Frankly, that approach is a recipe for disaster and will substantially devalue your expensive, hard-earned investment in your legal education. Think long term, so your hard work will really pay off.

Finally, remember that selecting a law firm and finding articles is a decision to be taken seriously, but do not be overwhelmed by it. Control what you can and recognize that there are elements beyond your control. Do not “beat yourself up”. Try to enjoy yourself. Take it from those who have been through it, you will look back on the entire process wondering why you worried so much.