

CAREER OPPORTUNITIES IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

Description of the Field

International Law is an interdisciplinary academic field for students who are interested in cross-border issues such as international business and human rights. There are typically two career paths within the field of international law. Students interested in policy making and the evaluation of adherence of countries to international agreements performed by governments and intergovernmental organizations tend to specialize in public international law while those interested in practicing law for private organizations and non-profits on issues ranging from international business, human rights, economic development and the environment tend to go into private international law.

Career Paths and Entry Salaries

The available career paths for an international lawyer can be broken down into law firms, federal government, corporate counsel, international organizations and nonprofit groups.

Private Law Firms handle most international business transactions, although the degree varies on the specialty of the firm. New York City and Washington D.C. have the largest number of international law firms; however, there are quite a number of firms in smaller cities. Law firms with foreign offices usually send midlevel associates overseas based on the attorney's skills and language ability. Once there, an attorney may choose not to return to the United States and still be able to achieve partnership. The starting salary for an associate in a New York law firms ranges from \$85,000 to \$89,000.

The Federal Government's largest employer of lawyers are the Departments of State and Defense, however each division either has a legal division in-house or a General Counsel Office. Lawyers at the State Department will have timely policymaking work and the opportunity to advise policy-makers. While the government cannot offer all the perks and comfort of a private firm, a young government attorney is likely to be given an immense amount of responsibility early in his or her career. Salaries for government lawyers are also lower than those in the private sector.

Corporate lawyers are the most active international lawyers today as most of the work done by law firms has now moved in-house. Corporations are more prone to hire a lawyer well versed domestic issues like antitrust law, contracts, securities regulations, or trademarks and then train them for international law. Each company has its own bureaucratic ladder within the legal department for young lawyers to climb and as a first and second year attorney you can expect to work very long hours on long-term cases.

International organizations and nonprofits offer a wide variety of options for an international lawyer. These organizations typically do not offer a solid legal training and lawyers are expected to hit the ground running. The United Nations Legal Counsel's Office and the legal departments of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have the most active legal shops. The United Nations Legal Office is deeply involved in legal problems arising from the administration of United Nations operations. The World Bank and International Monetary Fund attorneys can be assigned to leading operations or participate in the settlement of investment disputes between countries. Legal positions in the private nonprofit field include organizations such as Amnesty International USA, Catholic

Relief Services, and CARE. It is advisable for an attorney to begin their career in the private sector and then move into an international organization or nonprofit.

Demand

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, the long-term outlook for lawyers is that employment will grow about as fast as the average for jobs overall through 2012. The outlook for international law suggests growth as this area of the law is expected to grow even faster than other areas. However, competition for these jobs is generally high due to the large number of law school graduates and the current economic climate that is forcing some firms to cut back on hiring. Increasingly, law graduates are using their specialized training to secure jobs in related fields.

While globalization brings the private and public sectors closer together, the demand for international lawyers rises. Increasingly, larger organizations are establishing offices in foreign countries to handle international issues. This development has created a niche for lawyers with a Master's degree in International Affairs, language skills, cultural awareness and overseas experience. Developing countries need lawyers to assist in their legal transformations and organizations like the United Nations need lawyers to interpret their Charters and International Law.

Qualifications Necessary to Enter the Field

According to *International Jobs* author Kocher Segal, "Of the two degrees, law and international affairs, you will find the former of paramount importance in the job hunt".

To practice international law, it is essential for one to first hone legal knowledge and skills through internships and clerkships. A Master's degree in International Affairs, or a related field, should supplement legal education by providing insight into the international legal world and exposing you to jobs as they arise within your firm. While a J.D. and an International degree cannot guarantee work that is global in nature, the combination will prove helpful when such jobs develop within an organization.

Other skills that are highly recommended include foreign languages, research and writing skills, the, overseas experience, a strong interest in practicing law in an international setting, and knowledge of the basic differences in the worlds' legal systems as well as their political and cultural contexts. The most common foreign languages required by organizations include French, German, Japanese, Russian and Spanish. Overseas experience allows immersion in a foreign culture and helps to develop the understanding and patience required to work in an international environment. Participation in the Jessup Moot Court competition, working for an international law journal and securing a summer position in an international law firm are further ways to expand credentials. These skills combined with a background of law and international affairs will provide a solid foundation on which to build an international legal career.

Sample Group of Employers

Private Firms

- Baker and McKenzie, Chicago, IL www.bakerinfo.com/BakerNet/default.htm
- Cleary, Gottlieb, Steen & Hamilton, New York, NY www.cgsh.com/
- Coudert Brothers, New York www.coudert.com/
- Debevoise & Plimpton, New York www.debevoise.com/

- Davis, Polk, and Wardwell, New York, NY www.davispolk.com/
- Dewey Ballentine, LLP www.dbtrade.com
- Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher, Los Angeles, CA www.gibsondunn.com/
- Goodwin Procter, LLP www.goodwinprocter.com
- Sullivan and Cromwell www.sullcrom.com
- White & Case www.whitecase.com

Nonprofits

- American Civil Liberties Union www.aclu.org/
- Amnesty International www.amnestyusa.org/
- CARE, Inc. www.care.org/
- Woodrow Wilson International Center www.wilsoncenter.org/
- World Policy Institute www.worldpolicy.org

Intergovernmental Organizations

- Inter-American Court of Human Rights www.unige.ch/humanrts/iachr/iachr.html
- International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda www.un.org/ictf/
- International Monetary Fund www.imf.org/
- The United Nations www.un.org/
- World Bank www.worldbank.org/
- Court of Justice of the European Union europa.eu.int/institutions/court/index_en.htm
- Constitutional Court of South Africa www.concourt.gov.za/

Future Challenges of the Profession

The demand for international lawyers with expertise in international relations and cross-border transactions will continue to grow as the legal industry globalizes. The international legal field is constantly redefining itself by adding new areas to the practice, making it difficult for attorneys to describe themselves as an all-inclusive international lawyer.

The international law career field is unsystematic at best and preparing yourself to meet its demands is challenging because there is no international law career ladder to climb or road to follow. Another challenge of the profession is to not be discouraged by the lack of international work at the beginning of your career or the length of time it takes to develop your career. As a rule, a lawyer will gain experience exclusively in domestic law until a client involved in an international project requires their domestic expertise.

Resources for Additional Information

Associations

- American Bar Association www.abanet.org/intlaw/home.html
American Bar Association, Central and Eastern Europe Law Initiative
American Bar Association, International Law and Practice
- American Society of International Law www.asil.org/
- International Law Students Association www.ilsa.org/
- International Bar Association www.ibanet.org/
- International Chamber of Commerce www.iccwbo.org/

- International Municipal Lawyers Association www.imla.org/
- Inter-American Bar Association www.iaba.org/

Internet Resources

- intjobs.org – A tool to assist job seekers interested in international employment as organizations such as the UN, International Criminal Court, International Labour Organization, World Bank, etc.
- www.lawcrossing.com – Legal employment job and internship board and career resources for lawyers, law students, paralegals, legal secretaries and other legal professionals.
- www.idealists.org – A project of Action Without Borders which contains job and internship listings in economic development, social services, human rights, environment, etc.
- www.lib.uchicago.edu/~llou/careers.html - Website affiliated with the University of Chicago Law School which provides a collection of links to other job sites where users can search for law positions.

Publications

Careers in International Law: A Guide to Career Paths and Internships in International Law, the American Society of International Law, 2005-2006.

Careers in International Law, by Mark W. Janis, ed., Washington D.C.: Section of International Law and Practices, American Bar Association, 1993.

Global Law in Practice, Ross J. Harper, ed., The Hague: Kluwer Law International and International Bar Association, 1997.

Public Service and International Law: A Guide to Professional Opportunities in the United States and Abroad, by Stephen K. Park and Susan J. Feathers, 3d ed., New Haven, Conn.: Yale Law School, 1998.

The Official Guide to Legal Specialties: An Insider's Guide to Every Major Practice Area, by Lisa L. Abrams, Harcourt Legal and Professional Publications, 2000.

International Public Interest Law: A Guide to Opportunities in the United States and Abroad, A Joint Project of Harvard Law School & Yale Law School, 4th ed, 2002.