

No Grades, No OCI, No Bar? Tips for Law Students During COVID-19

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In just a few short weeks, the legal job market you've known throughout law school has shifted dramatically. The COVID-19 coronavirus crisis is like nothing we have ever encountered, and it brings extraordinary change and challenge for law students navigating their job search. Law students in 2008 and 2009 faced significant obstacles, but school was in session, bar exams were held on schedule, grades were awarded, courts remained open, and networking events went on as planned. Not so with COVID-19. The current situation is unprecedented, and much of the COVID-19 crisis is beyond our control.

Understandably, you may feel overwhelmed and unsure of how to approach your job search. What should you do?

The best advice in many situations is to focus on what you can control. Fortunately, there are many things within your control that can have a significant impact on your job search. As the saying goes, "if opportunity doesn't knock, build a door." If you have some time between classes, virtual social events and incessantly washing your hands, use this list to build your door. The following tips will help position students for success even in these difficult circumstances.

1 Continue Applying for Jobs

Recognizing the severity of the COVID-19 situation, students are asking whether they should continue to apply to opportunities. For most students, the answer is absolutely, yes.

Employers continue to post internship and post-graduate opportunities. Students should closely monitor and promptly apply to new opportunities that interest them,

keeping in mind that a prompt application signals a high level of motivation and a strong interest in the position. If students have not heard from an employer within seven days after submitting an application, they should follow up. A job search tracker will help them effectively manage their applications and follow-up.

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Finally, in all interactions with prospective employers, students should be sensitive to the current public health crisis by acknowledging the difficulty of the situation and being patient with delayed responses.

2 Follow the Market

One hallmark of the COVID-19 pandemic is uncertainty, and it is understandable how easy it is to feel a bit paralyzed in the face of significant uncertainty. Instead of allowing the uncertainty to stall your job search, remember that “knowledge is power” and begin monitoring current legal market trends.

Start by identifying trends that are likely to impact your job search. For example: Are certain industries expanding their hiring? What geographic markets remain strong? The key is, the more you know, the better positioned you are to prepare for every possibility. You’ll also be able to respond to a changing market more quickly, and in a competitive market, every edge matters.

The rest is easy: build a list of resources you trust and start regularly monitoring

those resources. Social media is a powerful tool for surveying the market and staying on top of emerging trends — consider using social media as a source for breaking, real-time headlines. Then, dig deeper with industry journals and news publications.

Another great resource? Your law school reference librarians! They too are working during COVID-19 and are happy to help.

Employers will be impressed with students who make the most of a challenging situation.

3 Set and Track Job Search Objectives With a 30-60-90 Plan

If there is any silver lining to the current health crisis, it is that life has slowed down for a minute, and many of us have some extra time. Consider leveraging this time to develop and execute on a 30-60-90 job search plan. These plans are

simple to develop and are a great way to keep yourself accountable with your job search.

To develop your plan, start by defining clear objectives for the next 30, 60 and 90 days. Focus on measurable objectives that will build your skills, improve your marketability, grow your network, and generally support your job search. Next, identify the specific action items you will need to take to meet your objectives, and assign due dates. The key is to get granular. Depending on the time available to you, you can shorten your plan to reach your goals sooner.

4 Build Your Skills

Every employer values an employee committed to continuous self-improvement. Consider developing marketable skills to support your career objectives. Which specific skills you focus on will depend on your personal career goals, but a few ideas include:

- **Legal classes/webinars.** Many organizations, including schools, employers, and bar associations, are offering free programs during the COVID-19 crisis.

- **Non-legal business/technical skills.** Consider learning the basics of accounting, leadership, or PowerPoint with free online programs and webinars.
- **Get published.** Consider writing or co-authoring an article, and work to get it published. This will be a great learning experience and an opportunity to build your resume.
- **Pro bono/volunteer work.** Pro bono and volunteer work offer the opportunity to give back, build your legal skills, and connect with more experienced practitioners.
- **Refresh language skills.** Employers often seek bilingual candidates. If you are conversant or proficient in a foreign language, consider brushing up on your reading, writing and speaking skills.

5 Build Your Brand

Now more than ever, your first impression with an employer will likely be a digital impression. Specifically, most employers will look at your LinkedIn page. Take time to review your LinkedIn profile and ensure it is updated, accurate and compelling. If

your profile picture is from your high school graduation, or if your skills have not been updated since your work study job in college, now is the time to fix it. Once you make these updates, solicit and incorporate feedback on your profile.

Updating your LinkedIn profile is just the first step in building your brand. Equally important is engaging with the LinkedIn community. Join industry interest groups, follow employers of interest, contribute meaningful content, and invite your contacts to connect. As always, moderate your own comments and participation online — if you wouldn't want your prospective employer to see it, the smart bet is to avoid posting it.

6 Build Your Network

Did you hit pause on your networking, concerned it might appear obtuse? While you are right to be sensitive to the public health situation, we encourage you to use this time to build your network. Virtual coffees, informational interviews, LinkedIn chats with former colleagues, and Zoom meetings with interest groups (e.g., your local bar association's law student section) are all great ways to make connections and build your network.

A few things to keep in mind as you network:

- Networking does not always mean asking for something. Having a virtual coffee with a former employer to “catch up” is valuable and important.
- Your conversation topics will likely change given the current public health situation. For example, you might ask how the current situation is impacting the attorney's clients, or which practice areas are busy.
- While we encourage you to network, we also encourage you to be kind and empathetic. When reaching out to your contacts, acknowledge the difficulty of the situation and be gracious if they are delayed in responding or do not have the bandwidth to connect.

7 Improve Your Application Materials

Have you been recycling the same cover letter for three years? We get it, but now is a good time to refresh your application materials, including your resume, cover letter and writing sample. As you review your materials, consider the following:

- Your writing has likely improved, does your cover letter reflect that?
- If you are targeting a specific organization, are your cover letter and resume tailored to speak to that organization?
- Do you have a writing sample that reflects your current writing ability?
- If you have experience working remotely, have you noted that?
- Ensure that any newly acquired skills and knowledge are represented.

8 Be Kind, Stay Positive

One of the most important things you can control during these challenging times is how you respond to the situation, and how you conduct yourself. It speaks to your character, and employers will take notice.

Remember that this is an incredibly challenging time for everyone. If an employer is delayed in getting back to you, recognize they are likely sprinting to keep up with all the impacts of COVID-19. If an opportunity falls through, remember that you are doing everything within your control to improve your candidacy and there will be other

opportunities. Be kind to yourself and your colleagues.

Also remember that employers will be impressed with students who make the most of a challenging situation. A student who accepts a data entry position to earn income, but simultaneously networks and builds skills to support their long-term goals demonstrates perseverance and an incredible work ethic. A student who learns their judicial internship has been cancelled yet works with the judge to author a journal article demonstrates ingenuity and flexibility. Ensure your application materials and conversations with employers reflect these marketable skills.

You've Got This

The current situation is challenging but taking the simple and concrete steps above will go a long way in supporting your job search. You've got this, and your career advisors are happy to help every step of the way. ■