

Law center career services help students secure jobs

Counselors give tips on how to develop marketable skills during law school and choose a career path

BY GABE BRADLEY
NEWS EDITOR

The complicated process of career planning is really trying to answer just one question, according to Jane Steckbeck, associate director for career services at the law school.

"How do I want to spend my time and my life energy?" This question, Steckbeck says, is the jumping off point in a law student's search for a fulfilling career.

"I help students find their own career paths," Steckbeck said. "It's a building process."

To this end, career services maintains a number of resources for law students including mentor programs in Eugene and Portland as well as alumni networking throughout the country.

"The process really starts building when you're a first-year," Steckbeck said.

All first-year law students attend mandatory meetings in the career services office to become familiar with the center's resources.

"We encourage first-year students to get work experience," Steckbeck said. "That's what helps them market themselves to employers."

This can give a job-seeker a vital competitive advantage.

"Just having a law degree in and of itself isn't going to open doors," Steckbeck said. "It's so important for students to be involved in their own career development."

Helping students get involved in the process is a big part of the advice Steckbeck gives.

"Get experience," Steckbeck tells students. "Even if you have to volunteer."

Having long-range goals is also helpful in developing marketability as a law student.

"It really helps to have a sense of what you want to do when you come in."

Steckbeck gives the example that a student interested in prosecution ought to volunteer to work in prosecution, take prosecution clinics and do writing assignments on prosecution-related topics.

"You can use that as a marketing tool," Steckbeck said. "You need to

show ... that you really are dedicated to this path."

Similarly, a student interested in public interest law should focus on getting public interest experience.

"They want to know that you have the heart and soul of a public interest lawyer," Steckbeck said. "Those jobs are very hard to get even though they're low-paying and very intense."

Steckbeck, a graduate of the University's law school, shares an example from her experience in developing her own marketability.

"I saw where my weaknesses were and I felt I needed to do better giving oral presentations."

So Steckbeck argued before moot court and eventually ended up joining the national mock trial team. Steckbeck encourages other students to practice skills in the areas where they are weak.

Also, while it's good to have goals coming in, students should be willing to adjust them, if necessary, according to Steckbeck.

"Halfway through I completely shifted gears — that's normal," Steckbeck said. "There's never really any place or time when you end up at a wall."

Flexibility can be just as important as focus in developing marketability as a law student.

"I actually recommend that students develop a dual career path."

An example would be a student who wants to work in land-use law but also enjoys making presentations. For this student, Steckbeck said she would recommend taking some criminal prosecution classes in order to develop a second set of skills.

Resources galore

Most students who graduate from the University's law school will end up working at medium or small firms, according to Steckbeck.

However, the resources available through career services can help students regardless of their eventual career goals.

One place where University law students often volunteer is the Oregon Department of Justice.

"It's amazing the experience they

get with the Oregon Department of Justice," Steckbeck said. "It's just tremendous broad-based experience."

This can lead to third-year students being court-certified to argue cases.

Also among the resources and contacts career services maintains is a legal job search database for students and alumni.

Employers can post jobs directly to the database, which allows career services staff to focus time and energy on finding even more listings.

Newsletter editor Kay Bailey maintains the database.

"Kay goes out of her way to search other legal databases," Steckbeck said.

Because of this, Steckbeck said she often hears from students that the database is extraordinarily comprehensive.

Interview programs are good opportunities for law students looking to get hired right out of school.

"There's a variety of different interview programs," Steckbeck said.

The Northwest Public Service Career Fair is one such program, which will be held in Portland and Seattle in February.

"The employers that come to that are strictly public service employers," Steckbeck said.

"Currently we are kicking off our fall on-campus interview program."

Participation in this program is reserved exclusively for second- and third-year students.

"It's primarily large firm employers that are going to hire second-years for next summer."

Resumes for the on-campus program are being accepted now. Career services will conduct mock interviews before the event in order to prepare students.

"We give them lots of support so they're successful in their activities," Steckbeck said.

Steckbeck also recommends several books to students looking to develop their marketability, including "What Can You Do With a Law Degree," by Deborah Arron; "Guerilla Tactics for Getting the Legal Job of Your Dreams," by Kimm Walton; and "The Official Guide to Legal Specialties," by Lisa Abrams.

"They are kind of starting points," Steckbeck said.

gabebadley@dailyemerald.com

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