
From Lawyer to Administrator



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Introduction

The original *Lawyer to Administrator Handbook* was born when David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students at University of Michigan Law School, Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students at Harvard Law School, and Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students at Cornell Law School, began discussing how they came to be in law school administration. When they noticed a trend among their own graduates, namely that many of them were looking to leave law practice for higher education administration, they came up with the idea of surveying other administrators about their career paths. The survey responses were compiled into the *Lawyer to Administrator Handbook*, which was originally published in Spring 2004.

The original handbook was organized essentially as a narrative. This revised version has been reorganized by topic:

- * The options available in administration;
- * Why administrative jobs are attractive;
- * The pros and cons of a career in administration; and
- * How to get a job in administration.

Acknowledgments

In the classic style of a bad Oscar-winning speech, we would like to thank all those who made this publication and web resource possible. The titles and institutional affiliations listed here are those as of the time the information for the original handbook was collected in the spring of 2003.

The editors, survey compilers, and those brilliant minds responsible for the original concept:

- David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students, University of Michigan Law School
- Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students, Harvard Law School
- Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students, Cornell Law School

Those who responded to the survey and allowed their words and thoughts to live on forever and ever:

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- John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services, Cornell Law School
- Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services, University of Pennsylvania Law School
- Gihan Fernando, Assistant Dean for Career Services, Georgetown University Law Center
- Richard Geiger, Associate Dean and Dean of Admissions, Cornell Law School
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- Sophia Sim, Director of Admissions, Georgetown University Law Center
- Meredith Wade, Assistant Director of Admissions, Georgetown University Law Center
- Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services, Cornell Law School

Those responsible for converting a book into a web resource:

- Meghan Commins, Intern, Davis Polk & Wardwell
- Bonnie Hurry, Director of Recruiting & Legal Staff Services, Davis Polk & Wardwell
- Liz Peck, Director of Career Services, Cornell Law School
- Janet Smith, Director of Publications, NALP
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What Are Your Options?

Administrative positions in higher education include an array of possibilities, from admissions to career services, financial aid, student affairs, and more. In this section, as throughout this publication, options are explored through the quotes of administrators who responded to the *From Lawyer to Administrator Career Paths Survey*.

Beyond the stories these quotes tell, you will want to do your own research on the administrative fields that most interest you. For example, NALP's 2005 *Law School Career Services Survey* revealed a median nationwide salary of \$70,000 for primary career services professionals, with a median of \$52,000 for the second professional in a career services office. For additional salary information on careers in higher education administration see *The Chronicle of Higher Education*: www.chronicle.com/special. (You will need to subscribe to view this data.)

The quotes from administrators that follow begin with their responses to the question: *What are your duties?*

Admissions/Financial Aid

My duties entail overseeing the entire admissions process, which includes recruiting prospective applicants, reading admission files, and making the final decision. Over 5,000 applications are received each year in our office. I also oversee all on-campus recruiting events including open houses and admitted students weekend, and I communicate with prospective students to discuss the application process. I further oversee the Director of Financial Aid, who handles the scholarship awards and general financial aid questions.

— Ann Perry, Assistant Dean for Admissions

Anything and everything with J.D. admissions.

— Sophia Sim, Director of Admissions

My duties include both admissions and financial aid components. For admissions, I read applicant files and make decisions on their candidacy, compile projections and reports about the status of the application cycle, conduct interviews of applicants, and participate in recruiting events. In addition, I assist the Dean of Admissions in any other tasks she may need help with, and I sit on the admissions committee, which oversees the admissions process. In connection

with Financial Aid, I both provide services to current students and administer the scholarship program for admitted students. For our current students, I counsel them on their financial aid options, help them understand the process and assist them with any problems that may arise, and act as a liaison between our students and the university loan office. For the scholarship program, I design the breakdown of scholarships and work with the financial aid committee to determine the goals of the program, and then, during the year, I grant the awards to the admitted students that the committee targets. In addition, I am the administrator of the Loan Repayment Assistance Program.

— Michael Machen, Director of Financial Aid

In my current position I assist with the day-to-day functions of the admissions office, including but not limited to: reading files; interviewing applicants; participating in the admissions committee; generating applicant volume reports; attending recruiting events throughout the country; coordinating and attending on-campus admitted student days; coordinating and attending off-campus events for admitted students; monitoring various e-mail and web-board accounts and responding to applicant/admitted student queries; assisting with the production/updating of admissions materials and brochures; and counseling/discussing legal career options with applicants and current law students.

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Associate Director of Admissions

Reviewing applications, advising applicants, attending recruiting events.

— Meredith Wade, Assistant Director of Admissions

My responsibilities include all aspects of recruitment (including publications), selection, and financial aid for our 570-student J.D. and 60-student graduate law (LL.M. and J.S.D.) programs. During my 16 years at my school, I also have spent a period of time overseeing the law school's computing/information technologies department and have been very active in national law school professional organizations.

— Richard Geiger, Associate Dean and Dean of Admissions

Student Affairs

Handle all student affairs involving Evening Division students; responsible for administering academic regulations and activities (advise students with regard to these regulations); investigate cases involving violations of the Code of Academic Responsibility; assist Dean in conducting preliminary hearings involving violations of the Code of Academic Responsibility; responsible for providing accommodations for students with disabilities (evaluate documentation, recommend particular accommodations, analyze changes in disabilities law); assist Dean of Students in conducting orientation, commencement, and other student events.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

I managed the law school's student services including the Registrar's Office, student events, and student activities; counseled students on academic, career, and personal matters; ensured compliance with university policies and applicable laws; planned and coordinated orientation week and the graduation ceremony; and served as the primary liaison to the university on matters affecting students. At different times during my tenure, I took on shorter term projects including chairing the law school's Centennial celebration; serving on the university's Committee on Sexual Harassment, co-chairing the law school's committee on the legal research and writing program; and administering the law school's academic support program.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Dean of Students

Counsel and provide support for students on academic and related matters. Oversee functioning of the Registrar's Office (schedule, building, registration, exam administration, degree audit, etc.). Develop programs and support mechanisms for non-traditional students, students with disabilities, and students with health insurance and childcare needs. Help advise and support student organizations. Interpret and ensure compliance with Academic Regulations. Plan and execute annual orientation programs and intra-school competitions. Assist with disciplinary matters, curricular issues, mentoring programs, and honors/awards program.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

Advise students regarding personal, career-related, and academic issues. Promote leadership and professional development by collaborating with students and colleagues (especially our Director of Academic Advising, Director of Student Activities, and Student Affairs Coordinator) to organize such activities as leadership retreats, orientation, graduation, and Honor Week and International Week. Work with Associate Dean for Academic Affairs in supervising registrars and in developing policies and rule proposals consistent with my school's academic mission. Act as law school liaison to university committees,

serving as the Disability Services Liaison and Harassment Prevention Advisor. Serve as Moot Court Advisor and worked as an administrator of my school's 2003 Summer Institute in Geneva, Switzerland. Represent Office of Student Affairs on various law school faculty committees, including: Administrative, Clerkship, Placement, and International Studies.

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

Overall responsibility for student services at the school, including career services, registrar, and academic support. As Dean of Students, I am responsible for academic advising, personal counseling (if related in some way to the student's legal education!), and crisis management. I serve as a voting member of a number of our faculty committees, including Admissions and Financial Aid and Academic Standards. I also serve as the law school's liaison with a number of university functions, such as Residence Life and Student Misconduct. As the supervisor of a number of lawyer administrative positions, one aspect of my job that I take very seriously is chairing search committees. I do a fair amount of outside speaking for groups such as the American Bar Association and the Association of American Law Schools on subjects such as law school honor codes, the status of women in law schools, and relationships between law schools and state bar admissions entities. I frequently serve on committees or boards of directors of related groups — for instance, the Board of Directors of NALP and the NCBE's (National Conference of Bar Examiners) Task Force on Conditional Bar Admission.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Career Services

Manage all aspects of the Office of Career Services, a 14-person staff (8 professional staff), to meet the career needs of approximately 1,900 J.D. students and 500 LL.M. students.

— Gihan Fernando, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Marketing and Recruitment: Working independently, develop and implement a national scale marketing plan. Market the school to new legal employers via target mailings, extensive telephone contact, and personal visits. Expand and maintain the employer network for recruitment purposes. Work closely with the Alumni Office in developing new job opportunities for students and alumni. Develop and maintain employment opportunities in the public interest area and areas where current geographic representation of on-campus recruiters is weak. Develop and maintain career services website. Represent Career Office at national meetings and conferences. *Employment Services:* Direct and manage employer services including on-campus interviewing, job fairs, and non-visiting employer services (including position announcements and resume

collection). Maintain computer resources for students and staff use in identifying opportunities and developing contacts with alumni, employers, etc. *Student Services*: Act as faculty advisor to the student Public Interest Law Union (PILU) and the National Lawyers Guild. Provide clerkship, public interest, and J.D. counseling. Responsible for public interest programming. *Career Office Management*: Prepare and administer the Career Office budget. Supervise the Associate Director for Career Services and Public Interest Coordinator; jointly with the Assistant Dean for Student Services, supervise full- and part-time office staff. Responsible for overall supervision of the Career Office library. Produce and distribute various placement publications and manuals including Career Services Manual. Respond to outside surveys: *US News*, American Bar Association, NALP Employment Report and Salary Survey, etc. Serve on internal law school policy committees.

— Karen Comstock, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Direct all programming, counseling, and recruitment activities of the Career Services office. Supervise a team of three professionals, two administrative support staff and student assistants as needed. Advisor to the Women's Mentoring and Minority Mentoring Programs, administer the Loan Forgiveness Program, and create and maintain the budgets for each of the above programs.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Counseling students who want to pursue public interest law as lawyers about the many opportunities, fellowships, and unique concerns that public interest lawyers face; bringing in various speakers who are public interest lawyers to talk about their work and career paths; and generally promoting public interest law and pro bono work in the law school community.

— Kate Rainbolt, Public Interest Coordinator

Provide comprehensive program of career services for students and alumni, including career counseling and education, informational programs, and large on-campus recruiting program. Manage office of six staff members.

— Susan Guindi, Assistant Dean, Office of Career Services

Provide counseling for J.D. students and alums; assist in planning and be responsible for implementing comprehensive series of career office programming; draft manuals and other resources for student use; work under the direction of the Assistant Dean for Career Services in the planning and implementation of on-campus interviewing programs and regional job fairs; design initiatives to develop new legal markets, including foreign markets.

— Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services

Alumni Relations

I direct the alumni relations program at a graduate school of business management that confers the M.B.A. and Ph.D. degrees. My responsibilities include planning regional alumni events throughout the United States and world and overseeing the school's regional alumni club network; organizing campus-based alumni events, including Homecoming, Reunion, etc.; serving as the point of contact between alumni and the school; contributing to the alumni magazine; overseeing *SageConnection*, the monthly e-newsletter to alumni (and contributing a Director's column); working with various student organizations in their outreach to alumni, and working with peer offices (Admissions, Career Management, Office of Women and Minorities) on volunteer alumni engagement.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

International Education

(1) *LL.M. program for foreign students*: Teach section of a required course in legal analysis, research, and writing and direct teaching team for course; work on promotional materials (brochures, website) and recruit students; admit students; advise students on academic issues (honor code, course selection); counsel students on personal issues; coordinate programs, such as court visits; advise and assist students with job search; help with alumni relations for LL.M. graduates; help with fundraising from LL.M. graduates. (2) *Joint J.D./LL.M. Program in International and Comparative Law*: Help recruit students; advise students regarding international careers; help with alumni relations for J.D./LL.M. graduates; help with fundraising from J.D./LL.M. graduates. (3) *Exchange and Externship Programs*: Meet with potential exchange partners from foreign universities; advise students regarding exchange programs; advise students regarding externship program (which gives credit for internship in international organization); advise incoming exchange students (see LL.M. duties above). (4) *Overseas Summer Institutes*: Teach introduction to U.S. law courses to foreign students; work on promotional material (brochures and website); administer Geneva program onsite in Geneva; help recruit faculty, find housing, etc. for Geneva program. (5) *Miscellaneous*: serve on several law school, university, Association of American Law Schools, and on my state's Bar Association committees. Many of my administrative duties are shared duties with the Associate Dean for International Studies and other administrators.

— Jennifer D'Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

Judicial Affairs

Manage Office of the Judicial Administrator (supervise staff, long-term planning, oversee budget, etc.); investigate and adjudicate alleged violations of Campus Code of Conduct (both through informal resolutions and hearings before the University Hearing Board); conduct outreach through presentations and written materials; participate in policy development across campus; participate in risk-reduction activities across campus.

— Mary Beth Grant, Judicial Administrator

Hybrid Positions

Approximately 60 to 40 percent split between career and student services. Career services duties include comprehensive career counseling and career-related programming. Student services duties include counseling students as to academic and personal difficulties, crisis intervention, advising student groups as to budgetary and other matters, and serving on admissions, administrative, and other law school committees.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

The official duties are “whatever the Dean assigns” — it’s a catch-all position. I do large and small projects and assist staff members in all departments on whatever they need, especially when they want to do a large project that the staff in their office doesn’t have time to do because of the day-to-day demands of their office. Two years ago, I began doing some admissions work on a more time-intensive basis, reading 25 to 30 percent of the admissions files. Last year, this was formalized to giving part of my time specifically to admissions (both reading files and the occasional school visit, as well as other projects) and added to my work with the Career Services Office, where I do career counseling and participate in all aspects of the office. I continue to do other projects, such as running 20 to 40 lectures a year, maintaining the school website, working on the Law School Centennial, and many other things. I have also taught a seminar for the past four years and will do so again this winter.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

Why Would You Want a Job Like This?

Work/life balance

*Are your family and work lives balanced? Would you like them to be?
This is what administrators had to say about the work/life balance
provided by their jobs:*

I value the ability to balance an interesting and challenging career with family life. (I work hard at the office, but I coach my kids' baseball teams and virtually never miss school events or the kids' games, and my wife and I are actually able to spend quality time together, too!)

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students, University of Michigan Law School

One advantage of being a law school administrator is the professional/personal balance provided by such a position. Unlike most full-time practicing attorney positions, these positions allow one to manage both professional and personal lives. Although there are times when one is expected to work extra hours, the work hours for these positions are very manageable. Most universities provide administrators with a healthy amount of vacation/leave time.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

People here also value my efforts and are happy to let me maintain a work/life balance.

— Michael Machen, Director of Financial Aid

Making an immediate, tangible difference in people's lives

There is no question that the practice of law makes a difference in the lives of others, but sometimes the impact is difficult to measure in day-to-day, tangible results. As the following quotes reveal, law school administrators have opportunities to witness the difference they make almost daily.

A key advantage is coming to work every day truly believing that you make a difference — whether it is counseling a student in trouble or improving a process to make students' lives easier, you can see and feel your impact daily (unlike a case that can take years to reach completion).

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

I am able to make an impact quickly.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

The ability to see the impact you are making in a very personal and very tangible way. Unlike discovery disputes that can literally last years, as a law school administrator you can often see the results of your efforts almost immediately. And when the results are the smiling faces of students, it makes your efforts all the more worthwhile.

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

On a daily basis, you are trying to improve the law school experience for the students. That is your goal — which in my opinion is a lot easier to get out of bed for than some forms of law practice. At the end of most days, you are able to go home and think, "Gee, I think I actually helped someone today." The work is endlessly interesting if you find human beings intriguing. You cannot get bored because the details of the dilemmas that students find themselves in are never quite the same. (Again, if you don't think people are fascinating, don't apply for one of these jobs.)

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

The best part of my position is being able to make someone's day/life when they find out that they were admitted to Cornell Law School. Having an impact on an individual's life is truly rewarding.

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Assistant Director of Admission

Working with students

For most administrators, the opportunity to work directly with students is one of the most rewarding aspects of their career. . . .

Working with students is incredibly rewarding. The students themselves are diverse and interesting, so no two days are exactly alike. Helping a student to work out a problem usually leads to tangible results (passing a class, finding a job, etc.) in relatively short order, so there is an immediate sense of accomplishment.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

I like working on a daily basis with students.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

If one enjoys working with and counseling students, these positions will provide one with a high level of exposure to the academic, personal, and medical issues involving students in law school. These positions and the issues to which one is exposed can be very challenging. Each day is different than the next. And one can certainly enjoy a high level of responsibility and respect in these positions.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

I am very unsuited to the corporate environment. I enjoy working with students, and I love the fact that I am hooked into a national network of higher education professionals.

— Karen Comstock, Assistant Dean for Career Services

One of the greatest advantages is working with students.

— Mary Beth Grant, Judicial Administrator

I truly enjoy working with students, especially foreign students, as they highly value and appreciate U.S. higher education, and I feel I make a difference in their lives (and in some small way in U.S. foreign relations).

— Jennifer D’Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

What I like best about being a law school administrator is the contact that I have with students. Also, I get to help them prepare for their future career.

— Ann Perry, Assistant Dean for Admissions

The greatest advantage is meeting students and the interpersonal contact while feeling that my J.D. was not wasted.

— Sophia Sim, Director of Admissions

In my short time as the Assistant Director, I've only met with a handful of applicants, but I've greatly enjoyed meeting with them.

— Meredith Wade, Assistant Director of Admissions

Working with smart, ambitious, creative students is wonderful. Learning their stories and then helping them explore all the opportunities that tap into their skills and values is very gratifying.

— Susan Guindi, Assistant Dean, Office of Career Services

I enjoy being around students.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

I have found that I am inspired by our students and their drive to solve society's ills, which in turn inspires me and reminds me of why I chose the field of law, specifically public interest law, as a profession.

— Kate Rainbolt, Public Interest Coordinator

Working with other university professionals

If you choose an administrative career path in higher education, you will be working with other university professionals who have taken pay cuts to be where they are — people who are dedicated and interesting. As the following quotes reveal, being surrounded by colleagues who share similar ideals can add tremendously to career satisfaction.

I find that working on a daily basis with other very talented and dedicated university and law school employees is very enjoyable.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

If I do say so myself, this line of work draws great people! Nobody does this work to get rich. Rather, people are drawn to it because they love the idea of working with and helping students. As a result, I work in a profession in which I honestly believe that most folks are measurably more caring, sympathetic, and helpful than average. It's a terrific, positive, healthy environment!

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

The advantages are that you get to work in a fun, intellectually stimulating environment with a group of very highly motivated, successful people.

— Michael Machen, Director of Financial Aid

I like working with very smart, talented colleagues around campus.

— Mary Beth Grant, Judicial Administrator

I work with others who share similar values and a similar work ethic. Don't get me wrong — we don't all share the same viewpoints (which is also a benefit of working in a university) — but at some level, just the willingness to forgo a lucrative traditional legal job seems to work as a filter that brings together administrators who have wonderful personalities and amazing outlooks on life. It's a great thing to be inspired by your colleagues and to trust that you are all truly working for a common goal — not a financial goal, but a goal of bettering your school's educational experience.

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

It is fun to come to work with really smart people every day — people who are focused on the learning enterprise. The conversations in the elevators and in the lounges are provocative in a way that law firm and banking conversations were not.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

I like my colleagues very much. Many could be earning bigger salaries in private industry, but have chosen instead to dedicate themselves to a “higher calling.” I find this inspirational every day. Your fellow administrators and staff members know the truth: ours is a very challenging profession that requires every bit as much dedication and skill as law practice does. Indeed, success in this field hinges on many of the same criteria that produce success in law practice: intelligence, discretion, the ability to communicate and interact well with a wide variety of people from a broad array of backgrounds, the ability to handle multiple demanding tasks simultaneously, attention to detail, strong organizational skills, and passion for your work and your “clients” (whether those clients are applicants, students, alumni, employers, or other institutional partners). This is why, ultimately, your staff colleagues and your relationship with them is the essential determinant of your happiness in this role. It is they who will provide you with moral support and from whom the greatest joys you will have in the job derive.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

The people I work with are great — they're smart, fun, and have priorities similar to mine, and this is true not only here but at the other schools I network with all the time.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and
Lecturer in Law

Some of the greatest advantages are educated colleagues; the opportunity for intellectual stimulation; and the diverse nature of both colleagues and clients (i.e., students). It's a generalization but one's coworkers are more progressive-thinking than in the business world in general.

— Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services

Working in an educational setting

Working in an educational environment can be another rewarding aspect of a career in one of these administrative positions. . . .

I enjoy working in the academic environment — it tends to be collegial and stimulating.

— Karen Comstock, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Teaching — and taking advantage of lectures and classes offered in the university on international and comparative law — means I am always learning and exercising my mind. Traveling (summers in Geneva, Switzerland for the past five years) is also stimulating.

— Jennifer D’Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

I love being in an educational setting and have taken at least limited advantage of the opportunity to continue my own education by taking a course in organizational behavior during the summer session. I aspire to doing more of this but will have to find a way to work around the great demands of my job.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

The variety of my particular position is great — I’m never bored and constantly learning new things. The access to everything a school has to offer is great — lectures, concerts, fun events that the students really like if we attend, like their charity auction, musical, etc. I feel like I’m using all my training and skills, including both my degrees, on a daily basis. I can stay involved in the law as much or as little as I want to. I feel like I’m often doing something worthwhile — helping the school to do something I believe in, helping the students get better educations, and helping the students through difficult periods in their lives.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

I like working in an environment where everyone is working toward a common goal, as opposed to litigation where life is contentious.

— Meredith Wade, Assistant Director of Admissions

I prefer educational settings, so that is why I applied for an administrative position in a law school as opposed to business (in addition to wanting to use my law degree if possible). I have the opportunity for continuing education.

— Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services

Having a more predictable work schedule with some flexibility

Administrators in higher education work hard. Long hours are sometimes required. But work schedules are typically more predictable — and tend to offer more flexibility — than is usually the case in law practice. . . .

The quality of life in academia is quite good. Make no mistake about it — these are demanding jobs. I routinely arrive in my office before 8:00 am and often stay till 6:00 pm or later, and weekend work is not uncommon. However, there is a predictability to academia that you don't find in private practice. Barring an emergency, I am not in the office late into the evening, and weekend work is usually known about weeks in advance, so I can plan around it.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

For me, the variety of what I do is very important, and the cyclical nature of the year is a relief from private practice.

— Michael Machen, Director of Financial Aid

I like the seasonal aspect of the work (although the first thing I am going to do when I retire is take a vacation in September!). And I love living in a college town.

— Karen Comstock, Assistant Dean for Career Services

The academic calendar and flexible hours are extremely helpful for parents (especially single ones).

— Jennifer D'Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

I love the predictability of the schedule — summers and vacations will generally be slow and allow time to plan vacations and get recharged before the start of a new academic quarter.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

A big advantage in my mind is that although the hours can be long (especially if you are in student affairs and a crisis develops or in admissions reading literally thousands of applications), there is considerable flexibility to the jobs. During the academic year, it is common for me to work 60 hours a week, but I may decide to go home at 4 pm one day and then return over the weekend to write letters of recommendation, reports, or memos.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

There's a lot of flexibility to the hours — if I need to go somewhere for an hour I can. There's almost never an emergency keeping me here late or on a weekend. I do work beyond 9-5 often, but I almost always know about it in advance.

(Quite a change from practicing law, and the single biggest thing that kept me from wanting to practice forever.)

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

I enjoy the cyclical nature of the academic world. There really is a beginning and an end to most of the things we do. Candidates apply, are accepted or rejected, and matriculate or not. Then it all starts again. The academic year has a real rhythm to it. (Incidentally, this is very different from my experience with law practice where there seemed to be lots of beginnings but never an end.) I find that this kind of rhythmic cycle facilitates planning and encourages creativity. It is possible to understand all of the components of a full cycle and to know that most of them will repeat themselves in some way every year. So, there's the certainty of what is likely to be required, but also the freedom that comes with being able to make adjustments as you go that are based on experience and intuition gained from previous cycles.

— Richard Geiger, Associate Dean and Dean of Admissions

Working “non-billable” hours

If you are practicing law, you are likely required to track your billable hours, and you may be required to work a minimum number of billable hours per year. Administrative jobs may pay less, but the “non-billable” nature of the work is valued by many. . . .

I'd be remiss if I didn't mention the “non-billable” nature of administrative positions. Truly, when I first left the practice of law, I think I would have included this at the very top of the “greatest advantages” list!

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

Though we work hard, nothing can beat not having a billable hour requirement.

— Meredith Wade, Assistant Director of Admissions

Advancing the mission of higher education

Knowing that they are advancing the mission of higher education was cited by administrators as being a meaningful part of their work. . . .

The greatest advantage of working in higher education administration is that you have total confidence in the “rightness” of the educational mission. In other words, you have the sense that you are a part of an effort that is truly worthwhile. Working at my school, I have the added benefit of being able to serve my own alma mater, an institution which gave me so much, and to which I want to give back.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

I am advancing the mission of an institution of higher learning.

— Gihan Fernando, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Having a high level of autonomy

Administrators typically have a great deal of responsibility for creating and managing their own programs and events. . . .

These positions can also provide one with a high level of autonomy. One may be responsible for various projects/events throughout the school year with limited oversight from others. If you enjoy “owning” your projects and being responsible for your own decisions, these positions will allow you to do so.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

I have lots of autonomy to be creative in programming.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

What positive and negative factors should you consider?

Making less money than lawyers who practice law

Administrative positions in higher education pay less than you would typically make in the private practice of law. Consider carefully how much money matters to you. Here is what some administrators have to say about making less money:

The biggest disadvantages to the position? That is easy. First, you will not get rich no matter how high up the hierarchy you go. You may never make as much as tenure track faculty, even the entry-level folks. However, you will probably make more than many public interest and government lawyers, if that is any consolation. And many of the law schools are located in non-metropolitan areas where costs of living are relatively low.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

You will never get rich working as an administrator. In fact, if you are coming from large firm practice as I did, you may NEVER make as much as you did when you were a first-year associate. NEVER. Not even 10 or 15 years down the road. Thus, if you are making a lot of money now and living accordingly, you need to think seriously about whether you are willing to undergo a major lifestyle change. If not, this is probably not the career path for you.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

You have to reconcile yourself to the fact that your friends who stay in the law firm world will have nicer houses and cars and take better vacations.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

A huge disadvantage is the low entry-level salaries.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Make sure that you are financially prepared to leave law practice. This is particularly true if you have practiced with a firm.

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Assistant Director of Admission

The known disadvantage is lower pay. (I personally took a 75 percent pay cut, which is probably a bit on the extreme side.)

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

The most obvious disadvantage is salary. These positions do not pay as well as if one were a practicing attorney. However, knowing that you have provided valuable services to your students or your institution may lead to greater personal and professional satisfaction.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

Salary is lower than private practice, though benefits at my school are generous.

— Jennifer D'Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

There are good benefits and retirement system.

— Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services

You have to be prepared to come into a position at entry level and entry-level salary. This gets harder the longer you have been in practice.

— Ann Perry, Assistant Dean for Admissions

The pay is pretty good for working for a nonprofit.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

Being "below" the faculty in the law school hierarchy

How important is perceived status to you? If you choose to become an administrator in a law school or university, you will find you are always perceived as being below the faculty in the academic hierarchy. Here is what some administrators have to say about being a lawyer in this setting:

Of course, there are downsides to academic administration, particularly as compared to law practice. As an attorney, you work in a profession in which you or those with similar educational backgrounds are almost always the lead decision-makers. In the academic world, you can have all the educational and experiential background in the world, but if you don't have an academic appointment, preferably with tenure, you are a second-class citizen when it comes to institutional policy. Sure, your advice may be sought, and if you're good, you'll usually be able to have a significant effect on outcomes, but ultimately those with academic appointments not only do the high-level decision-making, they also make the decision whether or not to consult you at all. This can be

frustrating at times, but I think successful administrators learn to live with it because the other aspects of the work are so rewarding.

— Richard Geiger, Associate Dean and Dean of Admissions

Administrators are non-tenured employees, so anyone with a big ego or who needs to be at the top of the heap should not pursue this field.

— Karen Comstock, Assistant Dean for Career Services

You will never have the status of the tenured faculty. If you are motivated to be top of the pecking order, you will be miserable as an administrator in educational administration. In fact, if you think you “might want to teach,” please do not consider educational administration as a back door entry into the teaching field.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

The disadvantage is that administrators sometimes feel marginalized and/or like second-class citizens because they are not the ruling body, i.e., faculty.

— Susan Guindi, Assistant Dean, Office of Career Services

Whether they are working in career services, student affairs, or financial aid, law school administrators necessarily play the role of “trouble-shooter.” While this is, in itself, not a disadvantage, it is sometimes difficult for us administrators to appreciate that our greatest success may be found during a day in which no one visits our office, nor praises our efforts — in short, during a trouble-free day. While students and faculty are generally appreciative of administrators’ efforts, it seems that they are most keenly aware of their efforts during times of stress — when a student doesn’t have a job, when a student fails a course, or when a student experiences a family crisis. It’s critical, then, for administrators to remind themselves that a quiet day should be viewed as a successful day and also to recognize that there will always be some sort of crisis to address, regardless of their efforts. What follows necessarily is an ability to take one’s job seriously but not personally.

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

I did not realize, for example, that there was a great divide between faculty and staff, with the latter occupying a significantly and palpably lower place in the hierarchy. Alumni and even some students can make it clear that they view the administrator’s job as “virtual retirement” — a cushy position from which to kick back and collect a paycheck, as opposed to the “hard work” of law practice. These phenomena can be demoralizing if one allows oneself to pay too much heed to the perceptions of others.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

The hierarchical nature of higher education can result in a gap between administrators and faculty (but less for me, probably, because teaching gives me some faculty status and having graduated from the school I am working for means that I already knew a number of the faculty when I started working here).

— Jennifer D’Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

Geographic factors

There are far, far fewer law schools than law firms, and there are only so many administrative positions within each school. Becoming an administrator may require geographic flexibility — and, once you find a position, geographic flexibility may continue to be a factor in advancing within your chosen career path. Are you able and willing to consider different geographic locations?

While many of my Chicago friends thought I was crazy to return to the “country life” offered by my school (“You drive by pigs and cows every day to work!” one exclaimed), I was willing to move to a smaller city for my first administrative position because I knew I would get great experience at my alma mater, where I still had wonderful relationships with professors and administrators.

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

Working your way up to your ideal job

When you transition from lawyer to administrator, you are beginning a new career. Your initial administrative position is likely to seem “less than perfect.” Consider these comments:

Be aware that you may well have to take a pay cut, and you may start out with a position that seems lower in terms of prestige than you may be accustomed to. Know, however, that (particularly if you are working at a large university) other positions throughout the university open up (and sometimes even new ones are created) that provide opportunities for advancement; you simply need to be patient and keep your eyes and ears open.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

Career ladders: this can be school specific, but once you run an operation (e.g., Dean of Students) your advancement options might include assuming responsibility for another department, taking on special projects within the school, moving to a bigger school, or moving to the university’s Central Administration. Big steps up usually mean less student contact, so you have to weigh the advantages of a move.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

When I first came to my current school, I made what some might consider an unwise decision professionally because I accepted a job that was technically a lateral move, rather than a position that might be more traditionally considered a promotion. Reflecting upon my choices, I don't think I'd change them — both positions I have had gave me a great foundation to allow me to do what I'm doing now. By taking the initiative to engage in work beyond the scope of my job responsibilities in my job at school, I was able to develop relationships with faculty, staff, and students that allowed me to step into my current role after my predecessor retired.

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

Practicing law prior to becoming an administrator

*Should you practice law before you try to get into law school administration?
Most law school administrators would say yes. . . .*

If you want to go into law school administration, whether in student services, career services, admissions, or any other field in which you will be dealing with students, it is extremely helpful if you have practiced law. It gives you first and foremost the ability to put law school into proper context for the students. Secondly, it gives you instant credibility with them. In terms of marketing yourself, keep in mind that many of the problem-solving skills that lawyers learn in law school and apply in practice are quite relevant to university and law school administration. You should use this to your best advantage when searching for this sort of work.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

I had been an active volunteer (fundraising and alumni activities) for the law school and always enjoyed this work. However, it took me a while to convince myself to pursue this professionally because I was worried that I would be consumed with the “What ifs...,” as in, “What if I had stayed at a law firm. Could I have become a partner?” It was only after I had become a partner in a firm and practiced in that capacity for several years that I felt comfortable pursuing this other interest.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

At times, I wish I had stayed in private practice a little longer in order to pay down my educational debt and build a nest egg. At the time, however, I was aware that this was a unique opportunity and one that was unlikely to reappear for many years.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Get a law degree and practice a couple of years before becoming an administrator. To effectively advise law students about careers in the law — including the question of whether to practice law at all — I think it is tremendously helpful for the counselor to have “been there.” I think it would be very difficult to tell a student what it’s like to work 18 hours a day, with the threat of malpractice hanging over your head in a highly pressured work environment, if you haven’t done it. Also, it is probably harder to go from administration to practice than from practice to administration, so it makes sense to practice first so you don’t wonder later what practicing would have been like.

— Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services

While it is not necessary if one wants to secure a public interest coordinator type position, I think it helps to have practiced in the field. Students like to know that the administrator has walked the same path and faced similar difficulties and choices in his or her own career.

— Kate Rainbolt, Public Interest Coordinator

A law school professor’s advice would later prove influential. Walking across the field after our graduation barbeque, I called out to my ethics professor, who had recently left a six-figure job as a partner at one of the nation’s largest firms, to ask her how long I should practice. She simply smiled and waved two fingers in the air. Whether she was serious or not, after two years, I found myself ready to make the transition from legal practice back to a university setting, and after two and one-half years, I was back working at the law school.

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

When I was in law school, I was involved in a few student organizations that involved peer advising. I enjoyed very much working closely with university administrators through those organizations. I also was an orientation leader every year during law school and came to know the dean of students through the orientation program. Based on these experiences, I spoke with her once during my final year about the possibility of a career in student services administration in a law school. She wisely told me that I needed to practice law for a while first, which I did.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

Being judged by students

How will you feel about being judged by students — many of whom may never have met you or sought out your services but hold opinions based on rumor?

It is tough to go from a job where your work is evaluated by a handful of partners to a place where you are judged by 650 students on a daily basis. Students are more likely to come with complaints than praise, so you have to be able to keep a focus on the enterprise and general levels of student satisfaction.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Academic credentials

Do you need an advanced degree to enter the field? Most administrators say no. . . .

I actually began law school with a clear goal of ultimately pursuing a position in higher education. I thought law school might change my mind about being a long-term attorney, but it didn't! Having been extensively involved in student activities as an undergraduate, I was fortunate to attend a club leaders' breakfast where I had the chance to sit next to our great president of the university, Tom Ehrlich, who was himself a lawyer. When I told him I was interested in working in college administration as a career, he recommended a J.D. over a graduate degree in education, which was considered a more traditional route. I took his advice and never looked back!

— Jill Miller, Assistant Dean of Students

I was very involved in student government throughout college. I enjoyed the interaction between students and administrators and the joint sense of ownership over the enterprise. I thought it would be a rewarding career and even asked a college administrator about it. She suggested getting a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration. This was not an attractive option to me at the time, so I opted for banking(!). My heart wasn't in it so I started exploring other options. I enjoyed a Constitutional Law class in college so I decided to apply to law school.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Missing the practice of law

No matter how much you want to transition from the practice of law to another use of your law degree, you may discover that there are aspects of law practice you miss. Here are a variety of perspectives:

If you think you will miss the practice of law (and you may find to your surprise that you do), then it may be a good idea to negotiate — after you have an offer in hand — the option to consult on the side. Having some ongoing practice experience is a plus in most law administration jobs because you remain connected to the bar and you better understand the world into which your students will be going and in which your alumni currently work. It may also garner you a bit more respect from students and alumni. You should be prepared, however, to do little or no outside work in the first year or two on the job, because there is a learning curve in law administration jobs as in all other fields.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

I think it is likely that you *will* miss law practice, especially in the beginning when you are suddenly overwhelmed by the newness of this field. If you are hooked on the highs of winning a jury trial and liked the flamboyance of arguing to a jury, the adjustment may be particularly difficult. I recall wishing that I could just have a few good jury trials a year to feel that wonderful rush. But then I would remind myself of all that I did not miss about practice. Truthfully, very few educational administrators leave their positions to go back into law practice. That alone should tell you something.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

I do miss practicing law, but not that much. I miss the people I worked with and the work itself (and the salary), but not enough to go back.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

These types of positions provide former practicing attorneys with exposure to laws governing educational institutions. In addition, the judicial student affairs policies and procedures are similar to judicial affairs, with its standard investigations, preliminary hearings, and formal hearings. On occasion one may be called upon to review contracts for the university or for student groups. Therefore, one does not have to “leave the law” completely.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

If you are looking for hardcore intellectual challenge in your day-to-day job, university administration probably isn't for you. That said, a university administrator has the flexibility to create such opportunities for him- or herself frequently: you

can make time to write an article or do work on a pro bono case, and there is an endless supply of lectures, conferences, and symposia to attend.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

The disadvantages compared to private practice are that the work is not as intellectually challenging (this is probably also an advantage) and also the adaptation to a service position can be challenging.

— Michael Machen, Director of Financial Aid

Working with less secretarial support and fewer coworkers than your colleagues in large private firms

Administrators in higher education typically have less secretarial support — and fewer coworkers — than their colleagues in large private firms. While you may have a great deal of autonomy for planning an event or program, you may also find yourself having to do the most menial tasks related to those efforts. Will coping with limited resources and assuming "menial work" be issues for you? Do you prefer working in larger offices?

You are also likely to work in an environment of understaffing which puts extra burdens on you if you want your operation to work smoothly.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

One of the greatest disadvantages is limited resources, keeping up with the demand — it seems that students and alumni have infinite needs and could use up as many resources as they are given access to.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

The many duties I have sometimes feel like too many hats to wear, especially all at the same time.

— Jennifer D'Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

How do you get a job like this?

Developing your story

To obtain an administrative position in higher education, you need to develop your "story" of why you want to do this work. Most lawyers are running away from practice. You need to be running toward the university for reasons you can articulate comfortably, as these administrators explain. . . .

I will start with what I think is, without question, the biggest mistake made by attorneys looking to break into academic administration. If you hate your current job, I sympathize, but I will not hire you for that reason. I love this field and, as a result, I am protective of it. Thus, if you are interviewing with me, it is not nearly enough to tell me why you no longer wish to practice. You need to tell me why my students will benefit from you. Why do you want to do this? Why will you be good at it? You would be amazed at how many interviews I have conducted which turned out to be little more than a gripe session. Avoid this mistake, and you are already ahead of the curve.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

Don't come to this profession as an escape from law firm life. Many people mistakenly assume this will be a "quality of life" job. There is tremendous quality of life in terms of satisfaction and control over one's hours (most of the time), but it does require late hours, weekends, being on call during vacation, etc.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

I think the most important thing is to go to higher education because it interests you, not because you are running away from something else, like busy law firms. I have heard so many people state that they are surprised at how stressful the jobs in higher education are, or that they expected to work fewer hours when they joined the academy. The jobs in higher education are demanding, but fulfilling.

— Mary Beth Grant, Judicial Administrator

I felt very lucky to get this job because the only experience I had in academic administration was as a college student. I didn't particularly know how to market myself, other than to convey clearly how long I had been wanting to work in admissions again. I think my strong academic record and my demonstrated enthusiasm for the job were helpful.

— Meredith Wade, Assistant Director of Admissions

Demonstrating your interest

There are many ways to demonstrate your interest: volunteer in your community or through your alma mater; serve on your firm's summer associate or hiring committee.

Any experience with universities, students, etc., will be viewed as a plus. We receive resumes from lots of highly qualified applicants who work at firms, and we always wonder whether they want the advertised job or just want to leave the firm life.

— Sophia Sim, Director of Admissions

Advice to current students

Despite the fact that most law school administrators advise practicing law before transitioning to law school administration, there are things you can do as a law student to facilitate a career path in administration. Experiences in various aspects of administration during law school can also help you decide whether this is a career path that will be satisfying for you.

If you are still in law school, *get involved* with the administration. Admissions might be looking for student recruiters or tour guides; career counseling might want peer mentors; alumni and development often need students to run phonathons, etc. The university might be looking for law students to serve on student life committees, or campus judicial hearing boards, or to work in the residence halls.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

One of the key things that you can do to position yourself well for a law administrator job is to be actively involved in activities as a student. This will expose you to a variety of staff jobs and, if you take your student organization responsibilities seriously, will earn you the admiration and goodwill of administrators who might serve as references for you in your job search.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

In many ways I have always been involved in student development. For example: as an undergraduate I was a Residential Advisor; in law school I was the Westlaw representative; and through the local bar associations I was involved in various law student initiatives/committees. The opportunity to work in admissions just seemed like a natural fit.

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Assistant Director of Admission

I would suggest being involved with your school — make sure the administrators know you, especially in the area you might want to work in, because administrators know each other across schools and will talk about good candidates and recommend them to each other.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

If you are a law graduate, getting involved at your alma mater, volunteering at local law schools, and participating in your firm's law school recruiting efforts are good ways to demonstrate your interest, as the following quotes explain.

Getting involved at your alma mater

If you are a graduate, contact your alumni office and ask if volunteers are needed to work on reunions, interview applicants, recruit admitted students, host students as career mentors, etc.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

While practicing, I served as an alumni mentor to students at my law school and was heavily involved in law student recruiting at my firm. I enjoyed these activities very much and, as a result, my desire to ultimately transition to a career working with students strengthened. My advice is: before making the transition, try to find ways to demonstrate that you have the necessary skills (and also to make sure that you will like the work!). Contact your law school about getting involved with students now. Offer to serve as an alumni advisor, a career panelist, etc. Local bar associations often have committees for law students and young lawyers — try to engage in similar activities through those committees.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

You should volunteer in your law school alumni organization, and should at minimum attend events sponsored by your law school alma mater. All law schools welcome assistance with fundraising, and if you are willing to do some of that and you find that you enjoy it, you should be able to gain entrance into a law administrative career via the Development Office of a law school.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

Volunteering at other/local law schools:

Universities and law schools provide many opportunities for people out in the community to get involved with the university. For example, we always solicit local attorneys to participate as judges in moot court and similar types of activities. Participation in such activities is a nice vehicle for developing connections with the university.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

If you were not particularly active with student organizations in law school, you can still get exposure to law administrative careers by volunteering to assist a local law school. Many schools can use practitioner volunteers to judge moot court competitions, serve as speakers at functions sponsored by student organizations, conduct mock interviews with law students, etc.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

Volunteer for administrative things at your alma mater or any local school to get yourself known and get experience — serve on panels for student groups, do mock interviews, come to admissions events. This experience is something to talk about in an interview, and also to make contacts.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

Because of the high level of competition for these positions by other attorneys, one should consider entry-level positions in administration that may lead to the type of position one ultimately desires. Law schools will value that one is an attorney, but will also require that one be familiar with the issues involving students. If one does not have any student affairs experience, one should volunteer as a law school student mentor or work with bar association/student organizations to gain such exposure.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

Participating in your firm's law school recruiting efforts

Ask to be on your law firm's recruitment committee and then get involved in the summer program activities. Involve yourself with your firm's marketing directors — part of admissions work is marketing. Remember that your resume will be scrutinized for demonstrated interest and commitment to students as well as interest in higher education.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Does your current employer have a recruiting committee or a summer associate committee? Get involved! If your resume lands on my desk and I see no evidence that you have worked with students recently, you have a problem.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

If you aspire to work in a law school career office, then it certainly makes sense to involve yourself actively in your firm or organization's recruitment program. Volunteering to interview associate candidates, represent the firm in on-campus hiring, organize activities for summer associates, etc., will at least give you exposure to the legal hiring market. Similarly, if you are interested in law admissions, then it might make sense to volunteer to represent your alma mater at college fairs.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

I was a member of my firm's recruiting committee, and I noticed that I liked the student interaction more than the practice of law. Additionally, I served as a mentor to some of the summer associates at my firm, and I found it very fulfilling.

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Assistant Director of Admission

If you work in a firm, try to volunteer with some of the administrative staff. If you want to do career services, being on the recruiting committee can help.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

Remaking your resume

Remake your resume so that it is functional, not chronological. . . .

In terms of marketing yourself, look at everything you do, not just what you have been paid for, and think about how those responsibilities would help prepare you for a job in student affairs. If you worked on a committee to establish your school's loan forgiveness program, mention that; if you are chairing your college's reunion, running a church fundraiser, or acting as an alumni career counselor for your college, emphasize the types of activities that would parallel the type of work you would be doing in the student services arena. If you don't have these types of activities in your past, it is tougher to make the credible claim that you are running toward student services rather than away from law practice.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Redo your cover letter and resume to reflect issues relevant to law schools — do not use the same resume you would use for a legal job search; make clear that you are looking for this position proactively because of your interest in entering the field, rather than because of your unhappiness in your law job.

— Gihan Fernando, Assistant Dean for Career Services

I would suggest that attorneys modify their resume for the position that they are seeking. While the skills that they have gained during practicing are transferable, those skills should be highlighted/showcased on their resume in a general manner.

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Assistant Director of Admission

Rethinking your reference list

What will law school or university administrators hear when they call your references? Your references need to be persons who can talk about skills that matter to the position(s) you seek. . . .

Think through your choice of recommenders. Your best recommenders will not necessarily be those who are in a position to say that your legal skills are excellent. Rather, the best references will be those who can comment on your background and abilities for the very different work of administration.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Researching your options

Research is an important part of your job search. Talk to the staff in your law school career services office: ask them about their career paths and have them connect you with alumni or colleagues. . . .

If you are interested in looking for a student services job, call the administrators at your law school to let them know of your interest. I find that people are generally very willing to discuss these career paths; contact your career services office to make sure you are able to receive any alumni mailings or access any alumni online services because schools often hear about these postings.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Network with your career counselor from your law school, or the career counselors at the schools in the area in which you are searching.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Reading about your options

Resources are available to help you learn more about your options. Devote some time to reading!

Learn about the field you want to be in. For career services positions, read the NALP (National Association for Law Placement) newsletter, the *NALP Bulletin*, and a book like Kimm Walton's *Guerrilla Tactics*.

— Gihan Fernando, Assistant Dean for Career Services

I would recommend reading the following books and publications: *America's Greatest Places to Work with a Law Degree & How to Make the Most of Any Job, No Matter Where It Is* by Kimm Alayne Walton (BarBri); *The Lawyer's Career Change Handbook: More Than 300 Things You Can Do With a Law Degree, Updated and Revised* by Hindi Greenberg (Avon); and *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. (The first book was excellent and even references financial strategies to assist you with your career/income change.)

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Assistant Director of Admission

Read the major career change books in the field of law including *What Can You Do With a Law Degree* and *Guerrilla Tactics for Getting the Job of Your Dreams*.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Reviewing the classifieds

You can learn more about the types of administrative positions available as well as about specific positions by reviewing the classified ads carried by The Chronicle of Higher Education, AALS, your law school's website, and targeted schools' sites. . . .

I would advise exploring websites of the many schools, particularly the bigger, more prestigious schools that have either a designated position or office for public interest law, to learn what they provide to students.

— Kate Rainbolt, Public Interest Coordinator

Familiarize yourself with the www.nalp.org website and its resources, most of which can be viewed at a nearby career services office.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Subscribe to *The Chronicle of Higher Education* or go online at www.chronicle.com to see the job listings.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Network, network, network

You've heard the advice before: network, network, network. The following comments explain why networking is particularly important to those who want to transition from lawyer to administrator. . . .

I cannot overemphasize the importance of good networking. I spent countless hours on the phone with administrators both at my school and at other schools gathering information and learning about potential opportunities before I got my first interview. Patience and persistence will pay off.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

Speak with everyone you know who is currently working in the field. Start with your own law school's dean and administrators. Through bar association and other activities, you may also have a chance to speak with folks from other schools. You will learn a lot from these folks and, in addition, you will hopefully wind up with at least a few people in the field who will steer opportunities your way. This is how I found my first job in academia.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

It is important to speak with individuals in the schools in which one is interested. Informational interviews at these schools are worthwhile, given that schools receive many resumes for very few positions. In addition, during an informational interview one can learn more about the school, the particular office, and possible upcoming openings. It is important to understand that not all schools, offices, positions, and student populations are the same. After each informational interview, it is recommended that you follow up every couple of months so that the administrator keeps your name in mind for openings.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

I would suggest that the best way to get information is by networking.

— Ann Perry, Assistant Dean for Admissions

I think that you need to keep your eyes out for positions in the field and make contacts so that you will hear of available positions. Everyone knows someone in higher education, whether it is a professor, a teaching assistant, a classmate, or friend. People at your alma mater can be a great resource. Also, try to identify the type of position and ask about what that position requires. Take an admissions director or dean of students to lunch, or quiz them on the phone (nicely). Before I interviewed, I called the Director of Financial Aid at my alma mater and basically had a practice interview with her, which she was happy to do. Always send thank you cards and be friendly, because you never know when someone you talk to will be in a position to give you a job opportunity! Also, I would recommend not being prejudiced against smaller schools, as

there are wonderful positions at every level of academia, and smaller may be better for you.

— Michael Machen, Director of Financial Aid

Anyone interested in academic administration should certainly seek out successful administrators and learn their stories. My guess is that there is no one track or magic credential that will work for everyone. Success in breaking into the field will depend on being in the right place at the right time, having the flexibility to grab an opportunity when it arises, having the good fortune of generous mentors, and being able to live with a “background” role when it comes to policy making. Patience and/or a willingness to move are also virtues. Senior administrative positions are relatively scarce and turnover tends to be non-existent. This means that unless you are fortunate enough to get exactly the position you want right off the bat, you will probably either have to wait (sometimes for many years) for a chance at a promotion or move to another institution when an appropriate position becomes available. In other words, a career in academic administration requires the ability to wait your turn, pay your dues, or whatever you want to call it. It may also mean that you have to be willing to pick up and move everything on short notice in order to achieve your goals.

— Richard Geiger, Associate Dean and Dean of Admissions

Obtaining an understanding of the field you are entering

Gaining knowledge of the field you want to enter can help you obtain a position — and hit the ground running once you do.

For anyone who would like to pursue a career services position with a public interest focus, I would advise becoming intimately familiar with Equal Justice Works and the many projects that they do. Obviously, when discussing public interest, money is always an issue. Therefore, I would advise becoming knowledgeable about loan forgiveness programs and the various resources available to students to help them budget for life during and after law school.

— Kate Rainbolt, Public Interest Coordinator

If you want to work in law school career services, become familiar with NALP (the National Association for Law Placement, www.nalp.org) and its many resources, as well as Equal Justice Works (www.equaljusticeworks.org) for insight into the public sector side. When I am evaluating resumes and interviewing candidates for these types of positions, if I don't see direct prior experience, I look for the candidate to demonstrate to me that they have done their research and they know what this job really is. And, I look for a student-centered approach and a personality suited to counseling.

— Karen Comstock, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Developing your counseling skills

Career services positions involve a significant amount of career counseling. While most of these positions do not require advanced degrees in counseling, they do require a different skillset than law practice. . . .

Take a few counseling courses. My position involves a lot of counseling, personal as well as career-oriented (the two are inextricably linked), so I would advise someone interested in this type of job to develop an understanding of basic career theory; learn the skills a good counselor possesses. It's not just chatting, nor is it the same as interviewing a client in the context of legal practice. Knowing some basic counseling skills will make you more effective.

— Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services

I advise alumni interested in this line of work to emphasize any counseling experience they have when applying for this type of job and to stress the interpersonal skills they have acquired. I also caution them that if their identity as “lawyer” is important to them, it can pose a challenge to transition to a position in which they do not practice law.

— Susan Guindi, Assistant Dean, Office of Career Services

General tips

Finally, two general tips for landing that job of your dreams. . . .

Be in the right place at the right time. Impress the people you work for. Always try to be positive. Create alliances with other departments.

— Jennifer D’Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

Think also about your own law school experience and how it might have been made better. Come to interviews with an eye toward ideas for improvements you might want to make.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

Success stories

Administrators share their own stories of how they obtained their jobs. . . .

While in large firm practice, I realized I didn't want to pursue a career in that setting and started a process of self-evaluation, testing, and networking. Through this process, I came to the conclusion that a non-faculty position in law school administration that would allow me to work with students would be a good fit for my interests and skills. I was invited by Georgetown University Law Center to apply for the position, went through an interview process, and was offered the position.

— Gihan Fernando, Assistant Dean for Career Services

I had been a member of the Cornell Law School Advisory Counsel and was on campus for an Advisory Council meeting when I learned that the school had decided to create a full-time Director of Alumni Relations position. My husband, who was none too fond of the demands that my law practice was placing on our family life, encouraged me to apply for the position. We both assumed that the position would give me somewhat more flexibility and time for my family than my law practice life did, and that it would allow me to return to a setting that I truly loved, which was Cornell and Ithaca. The latter, at least, turned out to be correct.

— Risa M. Mish, Director of Alumni Relations

I decided not to continue to seek employment as a law school professor because I loved teaching but hated publishing. A senior administrator at the law school had recently left and I approached the Dean about her position. I was not right for that position, but he was able to create this position for me instead. I've been in it ever since, although it has drastically changed over time.

— Marsha Ferziger Nagorsky, Director of Special Projects and Lecturer in Law

A former career services peer who worked at Fordham alerted me about the opening. I also saw an advertisement in *The New York Times*. I had several of my references contact the person to whom I would report.

— Abel Montez, Director of Student Affairs

I saw this position advertised on the career website.

— Kate Rainbolt, Public Interest Coordinator

I learned of the position through an online job board, but contacted a member of the faculty who had been a professor of mine. I then tried to identify what the

elements of the job were, and convince those at the law school making the decision that I was the right one for the job. I also had colleagues who knew people at the law school put a good word in for me.

— Michael Machen, Director of Financial Aid

I responded to an advertisement appearing on the law school's web page.

— Stacey Wiley, Associate Director for Career Services

As a student, I worked in the admissions office at my college and enjoyed it very much. While I was in law school, I wondered whether I should have been getting a degree in higher administration, because I always found myself thinking about going back to work in admissions. I found the job listing on the website for the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, applied, and had a phone and in-person interview. The phone interview lasted for about a half hour, and the in-person interview was half a day.

— Meredith Wade, Assistant Director of Admissions

I began working at Duke Law School as an adjunct teaching the LL.M. legal analysis research and writing course when my children were very young. As they grew older, I added miscellaneous responsibilities — whatever the law school needed. Eventually, I was able to consolidate all my administrative duties around our international programs, which grew substantially between 1987, when I started teaching, and 1995, when I started working full time for the International Studies department. Duke Law School called me and asked me to teach the course. The administrative duties were added as described above.

— Jennifer D'Arcy Maher, Assistant Dean for International Studies

Two years prior to coming to Cornell Law School, I was invited to my undergraduate college as part of an alumni panel. At that point, I had just begun to think about working with students on a full-time basis. I mentioned my interest to the Associate Director of Student Services for my college during my visit and she and I stayed in touch thereafter. When the position at the law school came up, she e-mailed me about it. Being a Cornellian helped, but I still had to do research on Cornell Law School and law schools in general. I contacted the Director of Career Services at Howard and she named a few reference sources. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *Black Issues in Higher Education* (now *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*), and other similar publications became a staple. I also contacted my classmates who were law professors or in university administration. Coincidentally, at the time I happened to be doing a bond deal for a small university in Cincinnati and I was able to speak with some of the administrators from that school. Essentially, if there was someone in my reach who knew anything about university admissions or law school, I spoke to them. Armed with good information and a resume that did not scream

“lawyer,” I decided to apply for the position and I was fortunate enough to obtain it.

— Michelle L. Jeffrey, Assistant Director of Admission

I realized during my clinic course that I didn’t enjoy being a lawyer at all. I kept in touch with administrators at Georgetown University and was invited to submit my resume when the position became available.

— Sophia Sim, Director of Admissions

While I was in law school I worked in the Office of Student Affairs, which exposed me to a variety of jobs that are available in higher education. I also began forming my network of people that I could discuss potential positions with. It was through networking at national meetings that I met other colleagues who were at the University of Chicago. When a position became available, I was approached to apply.

— Ann Perry, Assistant Dean for Admissions

I began my career in educational administration as Cornell Law School’s Assistant Dean for Admissions and Financial Aid in 1978. In 1983, I was promoted to Associate Dean in charge of student services. I have continued in that position all these years, but the portfolio is continually shifting. For instance, I now supervise the career services office but no longer supervise the admissions office. After three years in the criminal courts, I was eager to find a position with at least a bit more schedule flexibility. Having had my first child, I realized that it was going to be very difficult to be a decent parent if I couldn’t find time to take the kid to the dentist. The long commutes inherent in life in Los Angeles added to the complications of combining a career with family. Hence, a search for a more flexible position in a smaller city. I responded to an advertisement I saw in the paper. (I responded to *lots* of such ads — the position at Cornell happened to be one where I was offered an interview.) Remember this was a long time ago, and lawyer/administrator positions in law schools were a brand new phenomenon — competition for such positions was considerably less intense.

— Anne Lukingbeal, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

When I was interested in entering the field, I was advised to write to law school deans because I was interested in either admission or financial aid. I had some geographic flexibility and wrote a carefully crafted letter to 60 law schools along the East Coast. From this mailing, I received three interviews, one of which turned into my first job in career services at New York University. The reasoning behind writing to the dean went as follows: the dean is likely to know about openings in a variety of administrative positions before the position is advertised. The dean’s office is likely to forward your letter to the relevant offices for review. When the head of a unit receives something from the dean’s office,

they are likely to review it closely. I'm not sure how much of this actually happened, but it certainly worked for me!

— Gihan Fernando, Assistant Dean for Career Services

It turned out that I was very happy practicing law for the government and so anticipated remaining a practicing attorney throughout my career. However, after five years of being away from home, my wife and I decided to move back to Michigan to be near family. We focused on Ann Arbor, and so I looked for jobs both at the university and in the legal community. I reconnected with the dean of students and networked with many other university administrators. After about nine months of networking and interviewing for a couple of other positions at the law school, the dean of students called me and offered me a temporary (two-year) position doing student services work under her supervision (she was being detailed part time to work on a university-wide administrative systems upgrade). To make a long story short, during my tenure as a temporary employee, the dean of students ended up moving permanently to the central university administration, and I obtained her position.

— David Baum, Assistant Dean of Students

Once in law school, I became involved (once again) in student government, serving as President of our student government during my third year. I also created and orchestrated Chicago's first Admitted Students Weekend (which took an enormous amount of time). Again, I found that I really loved the work and found it extremely rewarding (even more so than my classes). Still, I stayed on the traditional track and opted to go to a large firm. When I arrived at my firm, I wound up chairing the firm's Associate Committee (again, a good deal of work which does not "count" in terms of billable hours but which I found rewarding nonetheless). I remember saying to a colleague that I wished I could get paid for doing the work I always did in addition to my "real" job, which is when the idea of law school administration surfaced. I was fortunate that the colleague I just mentioned was in a job hunt herself. She found an ad for a career services position at a great law school. I noted that the position requirements did not require experience in the field or a Ph.D.; they simply wanted lawyers. This opened up a whole world to me. I applied for the career services position and, in the process of getting references from my alma mater, wound up getting an offer from my own law school.

— Ellen Cosgrove, Associate Dean and Dean of Students

I think I was successful getting an interview in part because my predecessor in the job was Anne Lukingbeal (co-author of this publication), whose decision to become Cornell's dean of students was what created an opening for a new dean of admissions. Anne, like me, came to the position directly from practice and had become one of the leading lights of the law school admissions world. So, from her standpoint and that of others in the law school, the transition I was

proposing to make had a clear precedent and the model was a comfortable one institutionally. In any event, after what I remember as a grueling interview process that included some preliminary meetings and then a full day of interviews with committee members followed by an open forum with students, I eventually received the offer and promptly accepted.

— Richard Geiger, Associate Dean and Dean of Admissions

I secured my current position at Cornell Law School by responding to an advertisement.

— John DeRosa, Assistant Dean for Student Services

A friend who was familiar with my work experience and who knew that I wanted to move back to upstate New York told me about the ad for the Cornell position. I applied, was interviewed, and was offered the position.

— Karen Comstock, Assistant Dean for Career Services

I responded to an advertisement in my law school's alumni bulletin.

— Diane Downs, Assistant Dean for Career Services

Networked, applied, and interviewed.

— Mary Beth Grant, Judicial Administrator

I was already at the law school in a related office (Office of Public Service) and so applied for my current position when my predecessor resigned.

— Susan Guindi, Assistant Dean, Office of Career Services