



Considerations for Embarking on a Non-Practicing Role at Law Schools and Universities

By: June Y. Su*

This article highlights the discussion held at “[Non-Practicing Roles for Lawyers at Law Schools and Universities](#),” a program hosted by the New York City Bar’s Career Advancement and Management Committee on April 15, 2015.

The program was moderated by Kathryn S. Gutowski, Assistant Director, New Directions for Attorneys, Pace Law School, and featured four panelists:

Michael K. Dunn, Director of Investigations/Deputy Title IX Coordinator, Office of Equal Opportunity and Affirmative Action, Columbia University; **Jill Gardner**, Major Gifts Officer, Fordham Law School; **Kelli R. Johnson**, Assistant Dean, Pre-professional Advising, New York University College of Arts and Science Advising Center; and **June Y. Su**, Associate Director of Career Advising, Office of Career Services & Professional Development, Columbia Law School.

The panel discussion noted the following ideas for folks attempting to break into the higher education market:

1. Demonstrate Your Interest & Build Credibility

When interviewing and hiring for positions, employers will look for a demonstrated interest and/or commitment to working with the student population and to the higher education space. How does a candidate best demonstrate this interest on their resume? What can one do to gain some transferable experience?

- If you’re currently at a law firm think about getting more heavily involved in hiring and recruiting and/or mentoring and professional development.
- Join a New York City Bar Committee that enables you to work directly with the student population. Some examples include the Career Advancement and Management Committee, Law Students Perspectives Committee, Diversity Pipeline Initiatives Committee, Women in the Legal Profession Committee. These are just a few that are available.
- Volunteer! There are a multitude of organizations in the New York City area that are looking for volunteers to coach and advise on career matters or to help with fundraising. Your undergraduate institutions and law schools may need help with recruiting and interviewing students, a mentorship program or fundraising.

- Attend classes, workshops, seminars or obtain other types of training. This can get costly and is not necessarily required, but may be helpful to demonstrate credibility.
- Attend conferences relevant to your field of interest to learn about the work and meet current practitioners – A few examples include:
 - National Association for Law Placement (NALP)
 - National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE)
 - Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA)
 - The Student Affairs Conference at NYU
- Pursue courses in counseling, coaching, fundraising etc... with the NYU School of Continuing Education & Professional Studies
- Obtain a master's degree in higher education administration

2. Network! Network! Network!

Networking is very important and will help you learn what higher education practitioners do, better prepare you to interview, and build reciprocal relationships beneficial for now and in the future. Don't hesitate to use your law school career services offices (the offices are typically staffed with individuals that made the transition themselves), and reach out to individuals through your friends, family, past employers, alumni networks, and other affiliations. Don't forget to use LinkedIn as a networking tool.

3. Learn About Opportunities

Higher education jobs are advertised in many places. First, if you're interested in a certain school, look directly to the school's jobs webpage. If you're interested in roles at law schools, make sure to look at NALP jobs postings – <http://jobs.nalp.org>. Other higher education job websites worth noting include:

- Higher Education Recruitment Consortium - <http://www.hercjobs.org>
- Chronicle of Higher Education - <http://chronicle.com>
- Higher Education Jobs - <https://www.higheredjobs.com>
- Student Affairs.com - <http://studentaffairs.com>
- Academic 360 - <http://www.academic360.com>

4. Analyze Your Transferable Legal Skills

Your legal skills are highly transferable to a higher education career. As you educate yourself and read job postings, you'll start to notice a trend: many of these roles require you to counsel and advise, listen actively, communicate policies and procedures in a simple manner, read and write in a concise manner, edit and proofread information, problem solve, manage relationships, and organize and track information.

5. Cover Letters are Very Important!

You may not have found cover letters to be as important in your legal job search, especially if you found work through an on-campus interview program, but they are very important in a higher education job search. This is your first writing sample and the best way for you to highlight your interest in higher education work and any transferable skills and experiences relevant to the role. This is how you will persuade an employer to invite you to interview. Make sure your cover letters are tailored to the job you're applying to!

6. Preparing for the Interview

Higher education employers (even those at a law school) will expect you to be able to address why you're no longer interested in practice. Also be able to address why you're interested in working in higher education and the particular population you'll be working with (undergraduate student, law student, alumni etc.). Employers will want to determine whether you're committed to working in higher education and not just looking to escape the rigors and challenges of practice. And remember that members of career services teams are expert interviewers – make sure you're well prepared!

7. What's Great About Working in Higher Education

Higher education practitioners genuinely enjoy working with the constituents they are serving. They enjoy the counseling/advising relationship and/or working with other administrators, faculty and alumni. Many enjoy the ability to be creative and develop new initiatives. They are also working in collaborative, team-oriented environments which make it easy to go to work.

8. Challenges Working in Higher Education

Higher education can be challenging. The student population, especially the millennial population, may require you to reset expectations. You'll also be working with some upset individuals that may need more care than your office can provide. There can also be a disconnect between faculty and administrator viewpoints. Higher education institutions can be highly inefficient organizations. You will need to adjust culturally to a new environment.

9. True or False: Working in Higher Education Equals an Improved Lifestyle/Decreased Hours

Partially true. Most higher education jobs will indeed provide better hours and require less demands on your personal time than a full-time attorney position. But, there are also instances where you will have to work weekends and evenings. Keep in mind that roles can be very busy at certain times of the year as you are following a cyclical

academic calendar. You are typically busy when students are on campus and slower when students are on break. Also, millennial students do not shut off their gadgets. You will receive emails in the evenings and weekends! This improved lifestyle/decreased hours also comes with a significant pay cut and you should be prepared for this. What you do give up you will gain in lifestyle/decreased hours and other fantastic benefits. Depending on the institution, there may be opportunities to adjunct teach, although most institutions have a large population of individuals they can readily draw on for this purpose.

10. What's Next After My First Higher Education Role?

You will have many options. It will not be difficult to transition to another higher education role within an institution or from institution to institution. Depending on your background, it also will not be a huge challenge to transition to working with a different population of students (law student to undergraduate student, etc.). If you decide embark on a law school career services role, it is also very common to transition from career services to law firm administration roles in recruiting, professional development, diversity and legal personnel.

11. The Transition Back to Legal Practice

This is challenging. You should make absolutely sure that you no longer want to practice law before leaving. If you attempt to enter practice again you will be in competition with other attorneys who have substantial years of practice experience and you will be at a disadvantage. A return to practice isn't necessarily impossible, but it will depend on the candidate. Someone who was a partner at a law firm and has maintained his/her knowledge of the law and kept relationships with clients may have an easier time.

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