

CAREERS IN INTERNATIONAL LAW

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WHAT IS INTERNATIONAL LAW?:

For many years international law was practiced primarily by attorneys located in branch offices of large U.S. firms in major financial centers, such as London, Hong Kong, Tokyo, or Singapore. But with the increasing globalization of the world's economies, that has changed. Now, increasing numbers of U.S.-based attorneys practice international law. Attorneys who once dealt only with domestic laws regarding taxes, securities, labor, intellectual property, and other concerns today are often required to understand the equivalent laws in other countries. The international expansion of U.S. law firms has been driven by client demand – clients want seamless representation throughout the world as their financial transactions and acquisition activities are no longer restricted to a single country or even a single continent.

As the global economy grows, ventures in countries outside the U.S. raise numerous issues in a variety of areas of law. For example, attorneys assist their clients in resolving issues of ownership and sharing of intellectual property rights relating to technology, as well as product names and trademarks. Construction of an electric power plant requires acquisition and ownership of real estate and can also raise issues of environmental permitting and local government utility regulation. The appropriate corporate structure for joint ownership or lease of real estate and intellectual property rights can also involve consideration of tax consequences in the local country, as well as for the parent corporation in its residence country. As a result, U.S. attorneys must work closely with their colleagues in other countries to provide the necessary advice to complete such a project or transaction.

The growth in international law practice has been driven by the increased number of international corporate mergers and acquisitions and the reliance of businesses on international capital markets for their financial needs. Even mergers between two U.S.-based companies can present international legal issues. Financial transactions also have been a primary force in the internationalization of the practices of many U.S. firms. Companies in the U.S. are increasingly turning to the international capital markets for raising capital. Developing countries also seek large investments of capital for infrastructure development, or project finance. In making investments in developing countries, companies will often seek joint venture partners, which may be local or based in other neighboring countries.

LIFE AS AN INTERNATIONAL LAWYER

Where Do International Lawyers Work?

Many international lawyers work in law firms that have departments specializing in international trade or international finance. Such firms tend to be located in large cities. Other international lawyers work for corporations with international interests, accounting and consulting firms, financial institutions, government agencies such as the Department of Commerce of the International Trade Commission (ITC), and non-governmental organizations.

Who Are their Clients and What Types of Cases Do They Work On?

International law attorneys working in law firms generally represent corporate clients. Lisa Bostwick is an international finance lawyer in New York. “Our clients are generally investment banks or companies seeking to access the U.S. capital markets. Our office has clients from around the world and across an enormous variety of industries,” she reports. “In general, the companies seeking to sell securities in the U.S. have been fairly successful in their own countries and are seeking to widen their investor base. As their U.S. counsel, we provide our clients with legal advice based on U.S. law, regarding how to make their proposed transactions comply with U.S. laws and regulations.”

Herbert Shelley is a partner specializing in international trade in Washington, D.C., who represents corporate clients. "I represent predominantly large, commercial companies, both foreign and domestic. The foreign companies I represent are located mostly in Europe and Asia," he explains. "These clients require a variety of international trade services. They might need assistance in importing merchandise into the United States in compliance with U.S. laws and regulations, or they might need representation in bringing a claim when competing imported products may be violating U.S. laws or regulations or infringing client's intellectual property rights." These cases are often argued before the International Trade Commission.

How Do People Enter the Field of International Law?

Students who are interested in international law careers should seek out summer opportunities with law firms, state and federal agencies, the U.S. Court of International Trade and other courts, international non-profits and non-governmental organizations, economic development organizations, and human rights organizations. In law firms, an opportunity to work on international issues arises out of working on business law issues with a particular client that needs advice with regard to international transactions. A sound background in business transactions is often a good way to begin developing an international law practice. Many attorneys who work in fields such as intellectual property, real estate, and securities law find that international law issues become a significant, though not primary, part of their practice.

People who enter the field of international law often have a special interest in international affairs, perhaps as a result of international work experience or employment at a government agency such as the U.S. Department of Commerce. Study abroad programs, working for a year overseas while in law school, working as a summer law clerk in the Federated States of Micronesia, as well as working and studying in London during law school can all lead to opportunities overseas.

Skills and Courses That International Lawyers Recommend

Ability to Network to talk to lawyers practicing international law

Writing Skills

Creative Problem Solving

Analytical Skills

An interest and ability to work with people from other cultures

Strong interpersonal communication skills

High level of commitment to the practice

Business-related law school courses

Classes in international law

Writing courses

Moot court and appellate advocacy classes

Foreign language skills

LOCATIONS:

The best geographic locations for employers of international lawyers are the coasts: New York and Washington D.C. (especially for firms with a regulatory international law practice) on the east and Los Angeles on the west coast. Other cities with good international practice are Houston, Dallas, Miami, Philadelphia and Chicago. A substantial number of Midwest corporate headquarters with overseas dealings, are represented by Chicago firms.

RECOMMENDED LAW SCHOOL COURSES:

Commercial Law, Business Law, Sales, Contracts, Tax, Secured Transactions, Corporations, Corporate Taxation, Remedies, Antitrust, International Law, International Business Transactions, and Intellectual Property Rights are recommended. Courses in public international law are strongly encouraged even if an attorney plans to practice in the private international area. A growing number of issues involving private individuals against governments is requiring attorneys to have some background in public international law.

SKILLS AND PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Academic achievement is critical if you want a position with a very large firm that has an international practice. Networking skills are also particularly valuable. Language proficiency can provide that needed edge, especially when an attorney has proficiency in more than two foreign languages. International lawyers must also be interested in and sensitive to other cultures. Foreign study programs or overseas experiences are valuable to the degree that they can develop that sensitivity.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Government service is one of the best entry level avenues for future practice in international law. Government attorneys who gain experience in international law can generally move into private practice with relative ease. Law graduates who wish to go into private practice directly out of the law school need to become good domestic lawyers first, develop relationships through that experience, which can often lead to transfers overseas.

EMPLOYERS:

There are four main categories of employers for whom one can practice international law — the Government, U.S. District Courts, Private Firms and Corporations.

Government:

In Washington D.C. in several federal departments including Justice, State, Commerce, Labor, Office of U.S. Trade Representation, Federal Trade Commission and Federal Communications Commission. At the Justice Department, there are several divisions including: criminal (immigration and extradition), tax (international business transactions), environmental (antidumping issues) and antitrust (policy formation and prosecution).

The Judge Advocate General Corps provides legal counsel to the U.S. Navy, Army and Air Force divisions of the military. These positions are extremely competitive and require service with the military (varies according to military branch), yet allow for ample opportunities to travel and live abroad. Check the agency's websites for more information and application details:

U.S. Army: www.jagcnet.army.mil
U.S. Navy: www.jag.navy.mil
U.S. Air Force: www.au.af.mil/au/cpd/jagschool

U.S. District Courts

There are U.S. District Courts in places like Puerto Rico, Guam, and American Samoa, to name just a few, which offer opportunities to law students during law school and upon graduation. Getting a job working for a U.S. District Court is a great way to get established in a location and build relationships which can often lead to permanent positions.

Private Firms:

Many large firms practice in all aspects of international business transactions, including regulatory compliance and tax issues, and have branch offices overseas. Areas of practice include: corporate, securities, tax, real estate, regulatory, customs, anti-boycott, food and drug, and international trade. Many of the firms with offices overseas are large.

Small boutique firms have grown specializing in customs and international trade practices. These firms represent businesses, importers/exporters, retailers/wholesalers, and U.S. subsidiaries of foreign businesses. These firms tend to be concentrated geographically in New York and Washington, D.C., Chicago, Los Angeles, and Miami, or cities where the decision makers (federal regulatory agencies) are located.

Finding Legal Employers With Opportunities Overseas:**Martindale-Hubbell**

Determine which law firms have offices overseas by using Martindale-Hubbell - <http://www.martindale.com>. This website lists 250 of the largest law firms in the U.S. and contains links to their web sites, which will tell you whether they have satellite offices in other countries. Or use the National Directory of Legal Employers (NALP). This directory is available in our office or at www.nalpdirectory.com.

The Hieros Gamos Worldwide Law Firms Directory

This directory includes 2500 law firms in the U.S. and 170 countries worldwide. You may search the database by country and by practice area. <http://www.hg.org/lawfirms.html>

To find lawyers and law firms that practice commercial law in Europe, Asia and the West Coast go to The Legal 500 at these links:

www.legal500.com/index.php

www.icclaw.com/1500/uk.htm

www.icclaw.com/as500/asia.htm

www.icclaw.com/lfe/europe.htm

NALP Directory

The National Directory of Legal Employers (NALP) publishes a directory of mostly large law firms and some IP boutique law firms. It is available in print in the CSO or online at www.nalpdirectory.com. Firms in the directory each have a NALP form, which are a great source of information on salaries, concentration of attorneys per specific practice area, firm profiles, and other information.

ORGANIZATIONS & ASSOCIATIONS:

The following is a list of organizations and associations that can be a valuable resource for information related to your international job search.

American Bar Association Section of International Law & Practice

www.abanet.org/intlaw

American Bar Association/Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (ABA/CEELI)

www.abanet.org/ceeli

International Helsinki Federation for Human Rights

<http://www.ihf-hr.org>

email: office@ihf-hr.org

International Crisis Group
www.intl.crisis-group.org/

International City/County Management Association
www.icma.org/

International Rescue Committee
www.intrescom.org

National Democratic Institute for International Affairs
www.ndi.org

Soros Foundations network, Open Society Institute and National Foundations
www.soros.org

United Nations Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice Division
Vienna International Center, P.O. Box 600, Room E1212, A-1400, Vienna, Austria
+43-121345-4292

United States Agency for International Development
www.info.usaid.gov

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
www.unhcr.ch

Missouri Southern State College's National Center for International Education. There are links on this website to international job search sites, international internship offices and other resources on international issues. www.mssc.edu/ncie

Overseas jobs on the Internet & University career web sites - go to:
www.escapeartist.com/jobs11/careers.htm

INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS & ORGANIZATIONS:

There are many international institutions with well-established legal departments. Check out:
<http://missions.itu.int/~italy/vacancies/>

And <http://www.state.gov/p/io/empl/> - The US. Department of State maintains a continually updated list of international vacancy announcements with the United Nations and other international organizations.

And <http://www.reliefweb.int/vacancies/> - this is a job listing site with humanitarian organizations.

International Committee of the Red Cross:
[http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList2/About the ICRC:Human resources](http://www.icrc.org/Web/eng/siteeng0.nsf/iwpList2/About%20the%20ICRC:Human%20resources)

Amnesty International:
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/contact/employment.html>

Organization of American States: This is the oldest regional organization of nations in the world. It was established in 1890 at the First American Conference of American States. Some of the organization's purposes are to promote peace and security in the hemisphere, solve economic and political problems among its members and encourage cooperative action.

<http://www.oas.org>

The World Bank: <http://lnweb28.worldbank.org/hrs/careers.nsf>

Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE): The largest regional security organization in the world – active in early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. OSCE offers employment opportunities in its field missions and offices, the Secretariat, and Institutions. <http://www.osce.org/employment/>

FAS Online: Job announcements available through the Foreign Agricultural Service, Risk Management and Farm Service Agencies. Lists job opportunities with international organizations concerned with food and agriculture, such as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA), and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations. <http://fas.usda.gov/admin/jobs/jobs.asp>

The United Nations: The Human Resources section of this website contains posts currently open for recruitment. <https://jobs.un.org/release1/vacancy/vacancy.asp>

U.S. Federal Government Jobs: www.usajobs.gov

There may be jobs on this website for persons who are employed by the U.S. government but who are located overseas.

PUBLIC INTEREST JOBS

The Public Service Law Network Worldwide (PSLawNet) is a global network of over 120 member law schools and nearly 10,000 law-related public service organizations and offices around the world. PSLawNet offers current information on a broad range of pro bono and public service opportunities. Go to: www.pslawnet.org for more information. Also, please refer to the "Finding and Funding International Public Service Opportunities" document on the Office of Career Services' website or obtain a hard copy of it from the Office.

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