

## **How to Get a Job in Legal Academia**

Michigan Law graduates can be found in law schools all over the country, and many of our alumni also teach at law schools overseas. Michigan is known nationally and internationally for being among the small handful of law schools producing the vast majority of legal academics. Our graduates are represented on the faculties of the very top law schools in the country.

### **Is Being a Law Professor the Right Job for You?**

What does a law professor do, exactly? To answer this question, it's important to know that there are four broad categories of law professors: "research" professors, clinical professors, legal writing/legal practice professors, and adjunct professors.

Most of your professors in law school were probably a part of the "research" faculty. These were most likely the professors who taught you torts, and contracts, and evidence, and so on. While in law school, students see their professors most often in the classroom. As a result, many wrongly assume that teaching is the core function of a law professor. While teaching is important, those interested in pursuing a law teaching job need to understand that professors spend the majority of their time on scholarship. If you do not enjoy researching and writing, then a position on the research faculty is not the right choice for you, but there are other options available.

Clinical faculty teach students in clinical courses while also practicing law, generally representing clients who are unable to fully afford counsel. Typical practice areas include civil or criminal litigation, child advocacy, immigration, and certain transactional matters like low income housing or small urban business transactions. Clinical faculty at some schools may also teach substantive law courses (e.g., criminal law or civil procedure) and some schools expect their clinical faculty to produce legal scholarship. Faculty hired for clinical positions usually have practiced for at least three years in the area in which they will teach, and they may also have had clerkship experience. They are typically hired under fixed term, renewable contracts. In many cases they are hired under an initial, shorter term contract of three years and are later considered for a longer term contract, typically seven years, that is then presumptively renewable. In some schools, however, clinical faculty positions are considered "tenure track."

Legal writing or legal practice faculty teach required courses in legal research, writing and analysis as well as advanced courses in those areas or in other practice skills areas such as drafting, ethics, or advanced appellate advocacy. At some schools such faculty also teach traditional substantive courses. Candidates for such positions have generally been in practice for at least three years, and often have clerked in trial or appellate courts. They are hired under a variety of arrangements, including traditional tenure track appointments, three to seven-year clinical contracts, fixed-term renewable contracts of from one to five years, and adjunct contracts. Faculty are also increasingly being hired, in connection with legal writing programs or otherwise, to teach transactional skills courses. These courses include basic or advanced drafting, and transactional "practicum" courses, in which faculty teach substantive law courses, such as mergers and acquisitions or securities law, using documents used in practice.

Adjunct faculty are used at some schools to teach legal writing and skills courses, as well as substantive courses, particularly in practice-related areas (e.g. bankruptcy, ethics). Adjunct faculty typically continue the practice of law as their principal occupation. They are often hired on a per-course basis, with compensation tied to the number of credit hours taught. The best way to secure a position as an adjunct faculty member is to write directly to law schools in your area.

### **What UMLS Can Do to Help You Become a Law Professor**

Michigan Law graduates teaching in law schools throughout the country and abroad offer a rich networking resource for other graduates interested in pursuing this career path. In addition, every year, the Dean appoints a faculty member as the Faculty Advisor to promote UMLS alumni in pursuit of teaching positions. The Faculty Advisor can review your CV, advise on the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) hiring conference, and generally help you navigate the hiring process.

The Office of Career Services provides additional support. OCS counselors are available to review your application materials and provide advice to those interested in legal academia. OCS sponsors panels throughout the year on the variety of teaching jobs available, including tenured-track professorships, clinical positions, legal research and writing, and adjunct or visiting opportunities.

In addition, Michigan Law has recently launched some new programs and curricular offerings designed to help current students decide whether an academic career is right for them and to better prepare them for eventual entry into the job market. We have instituted a *Student Research Lunch Series*, which provides students with a forum for presenting a scholarly idea, a work in progress, or a full-blown paper to a group of interested faculty and students. The lunchtime sessions provide an opportunity for give-and-take about scholarly projects as well as a chance to develop ties with a community of students who are interested in pursuing an academic career. Students interested in producing a substantial piece of scholarly work in preparation for the job market (or for any other purpose) can also enroll in a for-credit *Student Scholarship Workshop*. This workshop allows students to spend a semester developing and refining a scholarly paper under the supervision of a faculty member.

If you are considering a job in legal academia, particularly if you are planning to enter the teaching market in the next year, please let us know. An easy way to do that is to send an email to: [aspiringlawprofs@umich.edu](mailto:aspiringlawprofs@umich.edu).

## **What Are Law Schools Looking For?**

### **Research Professors**

There are many exceptions to every rule, but in general, law schools are looking for:

- A. Writing, Writing, Writing.** It is difficult to overemphasize how much law schools are looking for applicants who will produce a substantial body of scholarly work over the course of their careers. Although the convention is to refer to the job of a professor as a job in law “teaching” it is probably more aptly described as a job in “research and writing.” Teaching is sometimes not even mentioned in the hiring process. Law schools want to hire entry-level professors who will produce scholarly legal articles right away. The most important thing you can do to improve your chances of landing a job as a law professor is to write, and try to publish, one or two high-quality articles before going on the teaching market.

**B. The Traditional Resume.** The emphasis on writing notwithstanding, law schools are still interested in hiring those who have the traditional markers of academic excellence. Law schools prefer applicants who have earned excellent grades at top law schools. In addition, hiring committees often are drawn to candidates who have:

- A Ph.D. in a field related to law (e.g., economics, history, political science)
- Law Review or other law journal experience
- A clerkship, particularly one with a prestigious federal court of appeals judge or Supreme Court Justice
- A prestigious job or fellowship, especially one related to the candidate's field of study
- Faculty recommenders who know the candidate well and are actively promoting her.

That being said, applicants whose resumes fall short of this ideal do get jobs in legal academia. As stated above, the most important factor is having already produced some scholarly work.

**C. A Word About Advanced Degrees:** Having a Ph.D. in a field of study related to law (e.g., economics, history, political science) is increasingly valued on the law teaching market. One reason that Ph.D. applicants seem to have an advantage in the hiring process is that they have significant writing experience, gained through writing their dissertations; and that fact increases the schools' confidence that they will continue writing.

### **When Should I Go on the Market?**

There are, of course, exceptions to every rule, but most people go on the academic job market within a few years after graduating from law school. After you have been out of law school more than six or seven years, it becomes more difficult to get a tenure track job because hiring committees may doubt that you are serious about your academic agenda (in contrast, it may become easier to get a clinical teaching job if you have more practice experience). Try to plan about

two years ahead before you start teaching -- one year to put your writing together, perhaps to teach as an adjunct, hone the resume, strategize with your recommenders, and then one year to be on the market and make the switch.

### **What Can I Do to Prepare?**

- A. Develop Research Ideas:** If you are still in school, take classes in which you will have the chance to write scholarly papers and get to know professors. As you take classes, start a file of ideas that might become articles. If you have already graduated, you should use every opportunity in practice to develop a research agenda.
- B. Write an Article (or two):** If you want to start teaching in the fall of Year 3, you would go on the market in the fall of Year 2. What you can do in the fall of Year 1 (or before) is to draft an article. This piece might be the subject of your job talk (more on that below). Better still, you would publish one piece before going on the teaching market and have a second piece in draft to use as the basis for your job talk.
- C. Write a Book Review:** Although Law Reviews usually solicit book reviews from professors, most journals will also consider publishing unsolicited book reviews. If you pick a book on a hot topic or one written by an important professor and submit a review to a flock of good law reviews, there is a chance that it may be picked up. Book reviews are easier to write than articles because they are more structured and require less independent research. They count less than articles, but are much better than no publication.
- D. Develop Relationships with Professors.** If you are still in law school, you should take advantage of every opportunity to get to know your professors. Taking seminars or paper-writing courses will give you a better chance to get to know your professors and a chance for them to learn about your writing skills and your academic potential. These courses will also give you the chance to develop the skills you will need for teaching -- legal

research and writing. You should take full advantage of every writing opportunity while in law school. Once you graduate, maintain (or rekindle) your ties with your professors.

Not all professors will be equally effective in making recommendations. Some faculty hiring committees place a premium on the prestige of the professors recommending a candidate. In most cases, though, it is more important to have faculty recommenders who know you well and can speak in some detail about your work as a student. When you are ready to go on the job market, by all means get in touch with all professors who know you and think well of you. Send your professors copies of your published work, as well as any work you did as a student. (It can be a candidacy killer if a hiring committee chair calls a reference who has no recollection of the candidate.)

- E. Attend Workshops and Lectures.** It is useful to attend academic workshops and lectures, either at Michigan or at other law schools. This will provide you with an insight into the culture and thinking of the academic world and will better enable you to anticipate the questions that you may be asked in an interview.
  
- F. Teaching Fellowships or Visiting Professorships.** Some law schools offer one- or two-year fellowships or Visiting Assistant Professor (VAP) programs. These will give you time to write and publish and can also produce contacts that will be helpful to obtaining a faculty position. The schools offering these programs are constantly changing. The folks at taxprofblog ([http://taxprof.typepad.com/taxprof\\_blog/tax\\_prof\\_jobs/index.html](http://taxprof.typepad.com/taxprof_blog/tax_prof_jobs/index.html)) maintain one of the most up-to-date lists of these programs. (The programs are not limited to aspiring tax professors).
  
- G. The LLM or SJD.** Graduate work in law is another vehicle that can sometimes help applicants obtain a teaching position. Graduate work in law can be important for foreign-trained lawyers. For domestically trained students, graduate work in law is usually aimed at a specialty such

as taxation or labor law, and some law schools will give weight to an applicant having such a graduate degree in law. A graduate degree in another discipline, such as economics, history, or political science, may also lend weight to your application.

**H. Jobs Before Teaching.** Law schools generally do not make distinctions among jobs after a clerkship. But two types of jobs can matter: jobs that are prestigious because they're hard to get (e.g., a Bristow Fellowship at the Solicitor General's Office) and jobs in which applicants have acquired significant substantive knowledge that will be directly relevant to their teaching and writing (e.g., staff member on the Joint Committee on Taxation intending to concentrate in tax; prosecutor or public defender intending to concentrate in criminal justice). It can be difficult to switch into teaching after too many years in practice. After more than six or seven years of practice, law schools may worry that you will have trouble starting to write academic articles. Candidates who succeeded in finding teaching jobs when they're more than six or seven years out of law school almost always have compiled strong publication records while in practice.

## **The Nuts and Bolts**

**A. The AALS Faculty Recruitment Conference.** Most entry-level law school hiring begins at the AALS Faculty Recruitment Conference, affectionately known as the "meat market." The Conference takes place each November, in Washington, D.C. Law Schools select whom to interview at the conference based, in part, upon information applicants provide through the AALS Faculty Appointments Register (FAR). The FAR form is a one-page, standardized form. It is essentially a condensed CV. At the conference, law schools conduct 20-minute interviews with applicants. On the basis of these initial interviews, the interviewers' impression of your written work, conversations with your recommenders, and your CV, law schools will decide whom to invite back to campus for more extended interviews and a "job talk." More information on the AALS Conference can be found at [www.aals.org](http://www.aals.org). There is a fee (\$350 in 2008) for registering with the AALS.

**B. The Job Talk.** The job talk is a scholarly presentation that you will give to the faculty at the school which is considering you for a job. Typically, the job talk consists of a twenty-minute presentation by the candidate on a scholarly topic, followed by a question and answer session.

**C. Getting Prepared.** If you plan to start teaching in September Year 3, you should start preparing in the fall of Year 1. The key items are: (1) having some writing underway that you can use as the basis for your interviews and job talk, (2) getting in touch with law school professors who may be willing to recommend you, and (3) preparing your CV and FAR form. You will want to have these documents completed in July so they can be included in the AALS's August distribution, and in the Michigan CV book, which Michigan will mail to law schools around the country.

**1. Writing.** We cannot stress enough that the most useful calling card for getting a teaching job is to have a piece of writing (preferably published) that you can show to hiring committees. You need to make time while in practice to write academic work that will showcase your scholarly agenda.

**2. Recommenders.** Having strong recommendations is vital. Hiring committees tend to be much more attuned to recommendations from faculty than from judges or partners with whom you have practiced. While in practice, you should keep in touch with faculty who may one day end up recommending you for teaching jobs; they may well be the key to your success on the market. You should always ask permission before listing someone as a reference and you should keep your recommenders in the loop with respect to your job search. Make sure that your recommenders are familiar with your written work, your scholarly agenda and your teaching interests. You should also inform them of your interview schedule and any offers you receive.

**3. AALS Resume (FAR Form) and CV.** The AALS resume form is limited to one page. The AALS does allow candidates to upload a separate resume (or "CV") along with the FAR form. Schools often make initial screening decisions based on the FAR form alone, however, so you should make sure that it

is as complete as possible and presents you to your best advantage. Contact recommenders and have them review your CV and FAR form to suggest ways that you may better highlight your strengths. It is important to be in the first AALS distribution in August, or at least in the second distribution in September.

**4. Research Agenda** You should consider writing a brief (two or three-page) agenda letter early in the process. It should discuss what your most recent articles argued, how you plan to extend those articles, and what you anticipate your scholarly agenda to be over the next few years. You might also indicate the topic of your job talk.

**5. On-campus Interview.** The on-campus interview is typically a combination of individual or small-group interviews, a job talk, and, perhaps, a meeting with students. The faculty will be trying to discover what you would be like as a scholar, a teacher, and a colleague. The questions posed are designed to reveal how your mind works, how you respond to questions, and how you handle new ideas, unexpected problems and challenges.

**6. Job Talk.** A job talk is usually a twenty-minute presentation by the candidate on a scholarly topic of her choice, followed by a question and answer period with the faculty. The topic should be one on which the candidate has done, or is doing, scholarly research and writing. It should make an argument and should display legal analysis and familiarity with the relevant scholarly literature, statutes and case law. The topic should also be one people will find interesting. *When you go to the job talk, the most important advice is to moot your talk beforehand, preferably in front of law professors.* Michigan Law can help you arrange such a dry-run.

**7. Be Entrepreneurial.** You are unlikely to get a job if you are passive in the hiring process. If you are interested in particular schools, by all means let them know. Some schools, particularly those outside the East and West coasts, might mistakenly assume that a candidate without obvious regional ties to the school's area on his CV would not be interested in

moving to the region. You can express your interest in a particular school or schools by sending an independent application packet directly to the school. We generally suggest that applicants send 20-40 such packets. The application packet should contain a cover letter, your academic resume, and reprints of your publications or a scholarly writing sample. You can send your application to the dean of the law school or to the chair of the school's faculty appointments committee. (A list of some of these faculty chairs can be found at <http://prawfsblawg.blogs.com>).

The following should go without saying, but we will say it anyway: You should reach out to every contact you have in the law teaching world, seek out every potential ally, write every thank-you letter, and make every phone call. Having all the right credentials is not necessarily enough to get a job. Hustle and plain good luck are also required.

## **Clinical Faculty**

The law school clinical teaching market is more varied than the traditional "research faculty" teaching market. Each year more schools look to hire clinical faculty by way of the traditional AALS job market. Accordingly, much of the advice given above applies equally to those seeking clinical faculty appointments. Some schools, however, hire clinical faculty through processes outside of the AALS market. As a result, if you are looking for a clinical teaching job, you should participate in the traditional market but should also look to other sources to find clinical faculty openings.

Many schools advertise for clinical faculty in the AALS Clinical Section's listserve (you can subscribe to the list at <http://www.washlaw.edu/subject/lawclinic.html>), the Section's newsletter (which you can read at <http://www.cooley.edu/clinics/>) and the Clinical Legal Education Association's website and newsletter (available at <http://cleaweb.org/>). It is important to monitor these sources for job openings. Once an opening is announced, the candidate should send an application package directly to the school.

Your application materials for a clinical position should include a cover letter, your academic resume, and your scholarly publications, if

any. Your application should emphasize not only your excellent academic record but also your practice experience. Generally, schools are interested in candidates with at least three years of practice experience. Some schools expect clinical faculty to produce legal scholarship. Accordingly, your application should emphasize your publication record and your promise for scholarship.

In preparing for the interview process for a clinical teaching job it is very important that you do good research. The process differs from school to school. Some schools expect a traditional job talk on a research project delivered to the whole faculty. Other schools expect a talk focused on clinical teaching, delivered to a subset of the faculty. Still others expect the applicant to come "teach" a class to a group of faculty and/or students. You will need to find out exactly what the school wants from you and prepare for your interviews accordingly.

In addition, you will want to be conversant in clinical teaching methodology and pedagogy. One way for you to familiarize yourself with the clinical teaching profession is to read the newsletters of the AALS Clinical Section (available at <http://www.cooley.edu/clinics/>) and the Clinical Legal Education Association (<http://cleaweb.org>).

### **Legal Writing/Legal Practice Faculty**

An increasing number of schools are choosing to hire candidates for legal writing and legal practice positions through the traditional AALS job market, so if you are looking for a job of this type you may want to register with the AALS and participate in the fall recruiting conference. However, many schools do not go through the AALS hiring process, as openings often become available after the traditional fall recruiting period has ended. Therefore, most schools (including those interviewing at AALS) welcome direct applications for open positions. A good resource for finding open positions is the website of the Legal Writing Institute (<http://www.lwionline.org>). Many schools also advertise legal writing and skills positions in print and web-based legal publications. State bar journals, the *National Law Journal*, the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, and *Lawyer's Weekly* are good places to look.

Your application materials should include a cover letter, your academic resume, and a writing sample. It is not enough to highlight your excellent academic performance. You should also stress your practice

experience, prior teaching experience, and scholarly publications, if any. Generally, schools are interested in candidates with at least three years of practice experience. Judicial clerkships and law journal experience are viewed favorably.

Some schools expect their legal writing and legal practice faculty to produce legal scholarship. Accordingly, your application should emphasize your publication record and/or your promise for scholarship. On the other hand, a legal writing and legal practice position is very teaching-intensive. The best candidates will be those who express a commitment to (and an aptitude for) both teaching and scholarship. Therefore, you should list on your resume any past teaching or mentoring experience, even if it is not legal teaching experience.

At many schools, the interview process for legal writing and legal practice faculty is the same as it is for all other faculty members. Almost all schools do an initial screening interview either at AALS or over the phone. Candidates selected for more intensive interviews may then go through another round of telephone interviews with program directors or hiring committee chairs. Candidates being seriously considered will be flown out for one-half to one day of interviews. Interviews may range from one-on-one interviews with the dean or the director of the program to small group interviews with faculty members and administrators. An increasing number of schools (particularly those with tenure-track programs) expect a traditional job talk on a research project delivered to the whole faculty. Other schools require a talk focused on teaching philosophy and methodology, also delivered to the entire faculty. Still other schools require candidates to instead teach a mock class to a group of legal writing and legal practice faculty members.

### **Additional Reading**

This is just a brief overview of the law teaching market. There are many excellent resources for those interested in careers in legal academia. Some of the best are collected at

<http://legalscholarshipblog.com/law-teaching-resources/>

## **Keep In Touch**

Michigan Law wants to help you navigate the law teaching market. If you have serious plans to enter the law teaching market in the next year or two, please let us know. Contact your former professors, especially those who might serve as recommenders. In addition, please send an e-mail to: [aspiringlawprofs@umich.edu](mailto:aspiringlawprofs@umich.edu)

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