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Nontraditional Career Alternatives for Law Graduates

Jay C. Carlisle, II
New York City

The large increase in the number of law students and law school graduates is causing concern because of lack of opportunities for employment in the private practice sector. This article directs its attention to other areas of work providing career opportunities to law students outside of private practice.

Speech delivered at the annual meeting of the National Association of Law Placement on June 16, 1977 at the Royal Sonesta Hotel in New Orleans, Louisiana.

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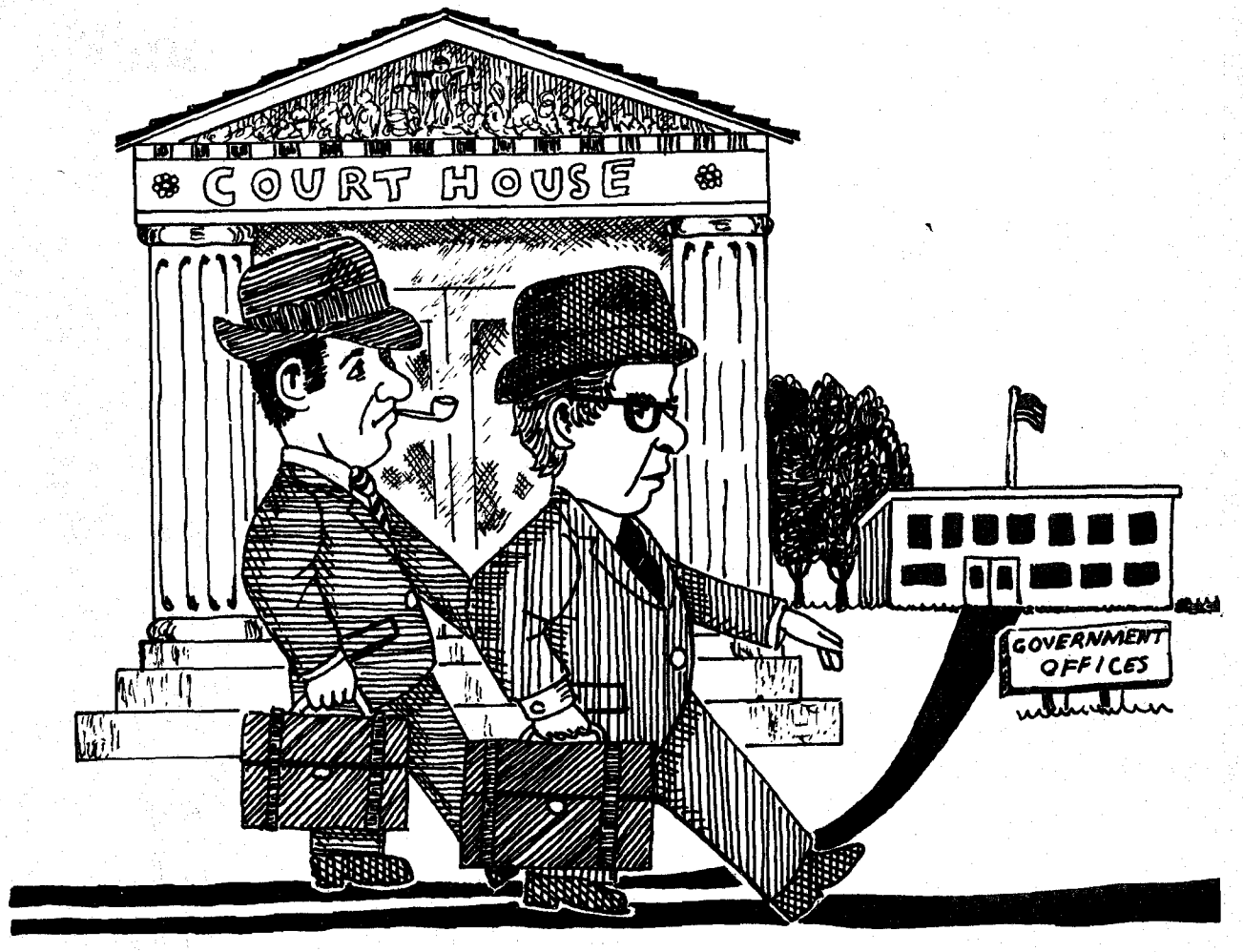

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I will confine my remarks and observations to areas of legal employment which are clearly nontraditional. I will not discuss the many opportunities law graduates can expect to find in the future in areas such as prepaid legal service programs and in the federal legal services corporation.

How often has a law school placement counselor heard a third year law student state, "I am going to be a lawyer. I do not want to work as a college administrator. I do not want to work with a bank. I do not want to work with an insurance company. I do not want to work with a real estate or corporate firm in a nonlegal position. I do not want to work with media or with state and local governments in a non-law position."

For some reason, everyone obtaining a law degree assumes that he or she must practice law. Recent statistics from the National Association for Law Placement, Class of 1976 Employment Report, based on employment data submitted March 1977, seems to confirm this observation. The National Association of Law Placement statistics indicate that of the 16,939 1976 graduates placed, only 392 are employed with nonlegal business concerns. In addition, 78 persons are employed with nonlegal government offices and 145 persons in nonlegal related academic positions. Approximately 1454 graduates are still seeking employment and the employment status for over 5,000 graduates is not known.

Law school admissions are increasing. Dean James P. White, Dean for Academic Planning and Development at Indiana University School of Law and consultant on legal education to the American Bar Association, states that the nation's law school enrollment continued to rise this year, as it has for the past twenty-three years, to a total of 125,010 students. Dean White's figures show 117,451 students in the 156 law schools approved by the American Bar Association and 7,559 students in 15 nonaccredited schools as of September 1976. Tom Goldstein, of the New York Times, tells us that by 1985 the number of lawyers in the United States is expected to double. Last week, Judge Jacob Fuchsberg, of the New York State Court of Appeals, predicted that within a few years the number of lawyers should exceed the figure of 800,000. Yet the United States Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates an average of only 20,000 new jobs per year will become available for lawyers.

We must face the figures. The simple fact is that a substantial number of law graduates will not be able to practice law. There is, however, no need to despair. There are—I submit—a large number of alternative legal positions available for law school graduates. It is the responsibility of law school placement counselors to identify nontraditional career positions, to encourage employers thereof to develop an interest in our graduates and to counsel our graduates as to the existence of the nontraditional positions and to the merit of seeking and accepting such positions.

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In preparation for my discussion today, I initiated contacts with a number of persons. I began by contacting the General Counsel's Office of the United States Civil Service Commission. Thereafter I spoke with Christine Steele, author of the book, "Occupations of Federal White Collar Workers," Second Edition, in the Manpower Research Division of the Civil Service Commission. Ms. Steele and members of her staff advised me that there are approximately 58,262 jobs in the federal government defined within the Legal and Kindred Group Series. Approximately 13,000 of these positions are classified under the General Attorney Series which includes all the law graduates who are members of the bar and are engaged in what is defined as the practice of law. Approximately 12,500 persons are classified as Claims Clerical Series Employees. This means that more than 22,760 persons have jobs which do not involve the actual practice of law, but which are within the Legal and Kindred Group Series. Included in such positions are the following: Estate Tax Examining Series, Hearings and Appeals Series, Administrative Law Judge Series, Deportation and Exclusion Examining Series, Contact Representative Series, Legal Instrument Examining Series, Land Law Examining Series, Passport and Visa Examining Series, Legal Clerk and Technician Series, Tax Law Specialist Series, General Claims Examining Series, Workers' Compensation Claims Examining Series, Loss and Damage Claims Examining Series, Social Insurance Claims Examining Series, Unemployment Compensation Claims Examining Series, Estates Claims Examining Series and Civil Service Retirement Claims Series.

There are over 8,558 current job positions for persons in the Social Insurance Claims Examining Series. Of even more interest to each of us should be the fact that there are over 10,000 job positions classified as Contact Representative Series. This series includes positions that primarily involve personal contacts with the public for the purpose of (1) providing information on rights, benefits, privileges or obligations under a body of law; (2) explaining pertinent legal provisions, regulations and related administrative practices and applications to specific cases; and (3) assisting individuals in developing needed evidence and required documents, or in resulting errors, delays or other problems in obtaining benefits or fulfilling obligations.

Although the preceding work does not specifically require a law degree, it is clear to me that graduation from a law school would give one a tremendous competitive advantage in locating such positions in the federal government. The positions are GS 9 jobs that offer a reasonable salary, challenging responsibility and an opportunity for advancement.

How does one identify positions with the United States Government? I suggest that each of you refer to the Federal Organization and Personnel Directory. You can obtain the book through Carroll Publishing Company, 1058 Thomas Jefferson St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20007. The Directory costs approximately $200 plus per year. The cost includes frequent supplements to keep the book current. It breaks down each government agency and department and contains names, room numbers and phone numbers of department heads, assistants and workers. The book permits one to have immediate access to job opportunities by telephoning a person or persons who may have information with respect to a particular area of nontraditional legal related employment.

Banks

I spoke to Anne Gilhuey, who is College Recruiter for the Chase Manhattan Bank in New York City. Ms. Gilhuey advises me that Chase recently recruited 100 persons for their lending program. Only one such person had a law degree. Nonetheless, Ms. Gilhuey advises me that the bank encourages applications from persons with law degrees, but that such persons do not appear to have any interest in the bank lending program. Chase pays approximately $16,000 to persons beginning in the

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lending program. Law graduates must apply by December or February of their third year to be considered for such positions. Likewise, Chemical Bank and Morgan Guarantee Bank advised me of similar difficulties in attracting lawyers. Chemical Bank tells me that there are over 100 management and training positions available each year in banking and finance with salaries in excess of $16,000. Traditionally, only 1% of persons obtaining such positions have law degrees. Law graduates are encouraged to apply, but usually do not have any interest in doing so.

It seems to me that if each of you contacted banks, trust companies and savings and loan institutions in your particular geographical area, you might find similar openings available for law graduates.

Insurance

Many students are reluctant to consider careers with life and casualty insurance companies. Nonetheless, there are many positions available for law graduates in these areas which are not filled due to a lack of interest thereto by law students.

Neil H. Ashley, Vice President of Claims for Allstate Insurance Company, started his career as a claims adjuster and later was an agent, sales adjuster, market analyst, associate vice president and now is vice president. In Vice President Ashley's address on May 21, 1976 to students at Suffolk University Law School in Boston, he pointed to many opportunities in his company and encouraged law students to apply for the same. Nonetheless, in the Rochester Region in Western New York, only two persons with law degrees are working in the 52 person claims adjuster department. Students at the State University of New York interview for such positions, but most individuals—including those who are now unemployed—say they would rather not have any work than to be employed as a claims adjuster. This type of attitude should not be encouraged by law school placement counselors.

Jean Alexander, of Title Guarantee Insurance Company—one of the three large Tirco companies—advises me that in New York State 47 persons or at least 10% of all professional employees of Title Guarantee are law graduates and most of the graduates are members of the bar. Likewise, the American Land Title Association in Washington, D.C. suggests to me that there are many opportunities available for lawyers in those areas of the country where attorneys are needed to examine titles. (This does not include opportunities traditionally available for outside counsel.) Frank Reddy of the National Association of Public Insurance Adjusters in Baltimore, Maryland has actively recruited associates at the U.B. Law School. Nonetheless, there appears to be very little interest by law students in this field.

The New York State Insurance Department currently employs over 250 insurance examiners. There are only five lawyers included in this number. The salary is comfortable—at least $12,000 to start—and the annual turnover is high enough to provide for at least 25 new positions each year. Law graduates would have a significant competitive advantage if they applied for such positions. It appears to me that insurance departments in other large states, such as California, Ohio, Illinois, Texas and Florida would have similar openings.

Real Estate

Albert A. Walsh, Esq., of New York City, who is former President of the National Realty Committee and formerly a chief New York City Housing Administrator, says that there are opportunities for lawyers in real estate, but it appears as though very few recent law graduates express any interest in such work.

State Offices

In New York State, there are many nontraditional positions available for law graduates. The New York State Depart-

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ment of Banking employs approximately 300 bank examiners at a starting salary from $10,000 to $13,000 per year. Only 4 of the bank examiners are currently lawyers. There is an annual turnover rate at the department which would probably result in from 20 to 30 new positions each year. Persons with law degrees would have a definite competitive advantage in seeking such positions. The New York State Department of Tax and Finance employs in excess of 1500 professional employees. Only 36 of such employees are lawyers. Other state agencies employing lawyers in nontraditional legal positions in New York State include Division of Treasury, Department of Motor Vehicles, Department of State, Department of Transportation, Department of Agriculture, State Labor Relations Board, State Department of Health, Department of Mental Hygiene, Department of Correctional Services and Department of Social Services. It seems to me that there are similar such agencies in other states throughout the United States and that if properly identified, one would find many nontraditional legal positions available which we could counsel our students to look for.

Opportunities in Higher Education

The National Association of College and University Attorneys 1976 Directory reports a listing of over 1,650 attorneys at over 1,000 institutions of higher education. This does not include, to my knowledge, members of law school faculty or law school staff. The 1976 figures represent an increase of 365 attorneys from the 1975 figures of 1,285. A quick review of the book indicates attorney positions available at colleges throughout the country; this is particularly true at small colleges and junior colleges where young lawyers are hired as staff and/or administrative assistants to presidents and vice presidents of such institutions. The young lawyer usually assists in drafting proposals, reviewing regulations, submitting legal opinions and responding to other questions regarding general practice legal issues. The salary is good and there is opportunity for advancement. Raymond Bowie, hired recently as Assistant to the President of Niagara Community College, advises me that his experience indicates there is a growing need for young lawyers to fill such positions.

Continuing Legal Education

A recent economics benefit survey of the Association of Continuing Legal Education in 1976 indicates that we can expect to see continuing legal education staffs in the United States double or even triple within the next six to eight years. From my experience, as a member of the Committee on Continuing Legal Education of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York and of the New York State Bar Association, I can state to you that continuing legal education is here to stay and here to grow. Mandatory continuing legal education is being considered in many states and has been adopted in a few. With the increasing complexity of the law, it is becoming clear to almost every lawyer that he or she must participate in continuing legal education. In California, the State Bar has a 90 person professional staff. Twenty-six of such persons are lawyers. The Texas Bar has a 12 person staff and 3 of the staff are lawyers. Other states with large programs include Florida, Illinois and Michigan. In addition to the State Bar CLE programs, there are a number of independent law programs such as the Practicing Law Institute in New York City which have similar professional staffs. CLE work for the most part involves service as an administrator in setting up legal courses, obtaining guest speakers, developing syllabus and curriculum, and encouraging attendance by the members of the bar. In most instances, this work clearly requires an administrator with a legal background and preferably a legal education. These jobs are well paying and I suspect that within the next few years, you will see

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many opportunities for young lawyers as CLE administrators.

Media

Dean Christopher Trump of the Columbia School of Journalism advises me that more and more lawyers are finding positions in the media. In addition to such well known names as Fred Graham, Jeraldo Rivera, Tom Goldstein and Paul Bransburg, more and more young lawyers are being recruited for positions in the newspapers and communications field. Dean Trump advises me that the increasing complexity of the law and the necessity to explain it to laymen requires that journalists and broadcasters often have a law degree. Columbia University School of Journalism and School of Law has what Dean Trump advises me is the first joint degree program in the country. We can expect to see more and more opportunities for young lawyers in these important areas.

Conclusion

I recently spent a delightful evening at a small restaurant in New York City where I sat at a table with six lawyers. None of the lawyers are presently practicing law. One lawyer is a well known actor, one lawyer is a successful accountant, one lawyer is a court administrator, one lawyer is a successful businessman, and the other two lawyers are engaged in administrative work. Each individual at that table advised me that he was very happy with his present occupation and that he never did enjoy the practice of law. Each person told me that he only wished he had known of the existence of nontraditional legal opportunities when he was in law school so that he could have taken advantage of the same. Fortunately for these persons, when they graduated from law school, they had the opportunity to practice law and to learn by experience that their career interests could be best satisfied in nontraditional legal areas. Today our law graduates do not always have this luxury.

It is the obligation of placement counselors to (1) identify as many possible positions as we can in the non-traditional legal area, (2) alert employers in such areas to the merit of hiring law graduates and (3) counsel our students to accept such positions. I believe that placement counselors should organize and present symposiums on nontraditional career areas. We should invite bankers, insurance company representatives, state, local and federal government representatives, and others with law degrees who do not practice law to explain exactly what they do and what opportunities exist for the law graduate. We should disabuse our students of the notion that everyone with a law degree must practice law.

Finally, Mr. Chairman, I submit to you that the National Association of Law Placement has an institutional responsibility to assist in the process of identifying nontraditional legal opportunities and encouraging law students to take advantage of such opportunities. A good number of law schools in this country, because of their prestige and strong alumni, will probably never have to be seriously concerned about developing nontraditional legal opportunities for their law students. However, a large number of law schools in the country today must—if they are to be fair to their students—seriously commit themselves to the development of such opportunities for their graduates. I can think of no more important task for the National Association of Law Placement to assume than a supportive role in this essential activity.

NYSBA

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