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## So you've got a J.D. Now what?

Amid hiring slump, schools offer grads new ways to find work as an attorney.

Stephen Kleege

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Sara Yood is doubly fortunate.

With the legal industry in a long hiring slump, she's not only landed a job, but she's also found a way around the entry-level law-firm drudgery that law grads have traditionally had to endure.

"I got to skip the law-firm part," said Ms. Yood, who in January landed an assistant general counsel position at a nonprofit trade group. "I was put on incredibly important projects immediately."

Ms. Yood had more than luck going for her. She used a fellowship program at Fordham University School of Law to land her position, with the Jewelers Vigilance Committee, a nonprofit trade group.

Fordham is one of many law schools trying to improve their students' job-hunting odds through new programs that provide real-world experience and contact with potential employers.

Most law schools have offered clinical programs and externships for many years. But New York's schools report that they've expanded those programs and added new ones in the past year or two. Columbia Law School, for instance, has added a Washington, D.C., externship program. Pace Law School recently rolled out a fellowship doing "legal work for those who desperately need it," said Joan Gaylord, media relations manager. "The win side of it for our recent graduates is they are getting hands-on legal experience."



**Buck Ennis** 

LIBERATING: Recent law-school grad Liberty McAteer found his first job outside the law-firm world—at a tech company.

And such programs are increasingly leading students to bypass law firms, which had been their usual route into the professional world.

"Right now the legal market is seeking to recalibrate the supply and demand," said Sheila Foster, vice dean for academic affairs at Fordham. "We're pushing students to look beyond the traditional placement."

There's no getting around the fact that law grads continue to face a grim employment outlook. University of Colorado law professor Paul Campos has estimated that nearly 45% of the 45,000 law students graduating each year cannot get jobs that require a law degree. A major reason: Openings at big law firms have dried up. The number of recent graduates in private practice who are at firms with 100 or more lawyers has plunged to 27%, from 41% in 2008, according to the National

Association for Law Placement.

## **TECH MATCHUP**

Like Ms. Yood, Liberty McAteer found his first law job outside the law-firm world. He won a position as in-house counsel at Tipping Point Partners after what he calls a "semester-long audition" arranged through Brooklyn Law School.

One of Mr. McAteer's duties at Tipping Point, which he described as a serial co-founder of tech startups, is to manage outside legal counsel to keep legal expenses in check.

Mr. McAteer landed his job through the Brooklyn Law Incubator & Policy Clinic, a four-year-old program that aims to match technology-oriented law students with New York tech entrepreneurs who need help turning their ideas into sustainable businesses.

## A DOSE OF REALITY

Under the supervision of Professor Jonathan Askin, a technology adviser to Barack Obama's 2008 presidential campaign, students offer pro bono services on such matters as incorporation, intellectual-property protection and Web documentation.

Such programs do improve students' chances of landing law-related jobs, said Jacqueline Newman, the hiring manager at Berkman Bottger Newman & Rodd, a nine-lawyer firm in New York that specializes in matrimonial law. She said she looks especially favorably on applicants who've interned with a judge, which allows them to see how courtrooms operate.

"What you read in books doesn't give you a lot of reality," she said. "The more practical experience, the better."

Practical experience is just what Ms. Yood got through Fordham's two-year-old Fashion Law Institute, through which law students help companies with designer contracts, intellectual-property rights and other legal issues.

There is a caveat for students who choose to abandon the traditional employment path: They may take a financial hit. Salaries of \$145,000 or \$160,000 are typical at big law firms, while the median for in-house positions within business is \$72,000, according to NALP. The trade-off, recent grads like Ms. Yood and Mr. McAteer say, may be greater job satisfaction, shorter hours and other creature comforts.

Mr. McAteer said his job pays a "comfortable salary," and added, "I get to wear jeans to the office."



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