

## NALP Research:

### New from NALP and the NALP Foundation —

# *The 2011 Survey of Law School Experiential Learning Opportunities and Benefits: Responses from Government and Nonprofit Lawyers*

by Judith N. Collins

Recently NALP and the NALP Foundation worked with two NALP Sections — Lawyer Professional Development and Law Student Professional Development — to create and implement the *2011 Survey of Law School Experiential Learning Opportunities and Benefits*. This survey was targeted to attorneys practicing in public interest and government settings and was designed as a companion to a similar survey conducted among law firm associates in 2010. The full new report, available this month from the NALP Foundation, provides a complete description of the research project and methodology.

This column touches on just a few of the questions asked and answered by the survey, which was completed by 1,212 attorneys employed in civil legal services organizations, as state and local prosecutors, as public defenders, in the federal government, in other state and local government agencies, and in public interest organizations in late 2011.

- *Did you participate in a clinic (or clinics) for credit representing individual clients during law school and how useful was that experience in preparing you for the practice of law?* Over half (56%) reported having participated in at least one clinic during law school. Within this group, 83% rated these clinics “very useful” and less than 1% of the respondents in this group rated the clinics as “not useful at all.”
- *Did you complete an externship or field placement for credit during law school, and how useful was that experience in preparing you for the practice of law?* A similar percentage of respondents (53%) reported having completed one or more externships or field placements during law school, and almost three-quarters (72%) of attorneys who reported participating in at least one externship or field placement rated the experience as “very useful.”
- *Did you take one or more legal practice skills or simulation courses during law school, and how useful were those courses in preparing you for the practice of law?* Fully 83% of respondents indicated that they had taken one or more practice skills courses, with 34% reporting that they had taken three or more practice skills courses. The most common practice skills course taken by this group was Trial Advocacy. The responses reveal that the attorneys who reported participating in at least one of these courses considered them to be relatively less useful compared to clinics and externships, with only 48% considering their practice skills courses to be “very useful.”
- *Did you participate in required or volunteer pro bono service during law school and, if so, how useful was that experience in preparing you for the practice of law?* Over half of respondents (54%) reported participating in

required or voluntary pro bono work during law school. Similar to the findings for skills courses, 50% of these attorneys found this type of hands-on learning to be “very useful,” with an average score of 3.2 on a scale of 1 to 4 (with 1 being “not at all useful” and 4 being “very useful”) compared to the overall usefulness ratings of legal clinics (average score of 3.8), externships or field placements (average score of 3.6), and skills courses (average score of 3.3).

Look to the full report for many details on these topics and more, including the setting for externship

placements, the length of clinics, and the specific kinds of legal skills courses taken. There are differences between attorneys whose practice is litigation-based and those whose work is regulatory. The report also takes a look at pro bono work during law school as well as the value of all of these experiences in obtaining a public interest job and their application in the current job.

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