

# Helping Alumni Navigate the Law Teaching Market

by *Marta Ricardo and Jeanine Dames*

For alumni who express interest in becoming a law professor, the process of navigating the law teaching market can be daunting. As with any position, candidates should first understand the nature of the position and then map a job search strategy. The work of a law professor combines research, writing, and teaching. In fact, the primary focus of most professorships is scholarship. Therefore, law teaching may not be right for everyone, particularly in the case of graduates who do not enjoy intense research and writing.

## Types of Academic Positions

The first step in counseling graduates interested in law teaching is to discuss the variety of available academic positions. In addition to tenure track teaching and clinical positions, other opportunities that may be available to an entering professor include positions as visitors, adjuncts, and legal research and writing instructors.

Historically, a visiting professor was a professor from one institution who was hired to spend a semester or a year at another law school. Recently an increasing number of schools have created “visiting assistant professor” programs for those not currently on a law faculty. These programs, also called VAPS, combine writing with teaching and have been used by candidates as a successful route into the tenure track law teaching market.

In addition to visiting professors, law schools often hire adjunct professors to teach a specific course for a semester. An adjunct teaching posi-

tion can be valuable to help evaluate a candidate and see if he or she enjoys teaching. Adjunct work also may provide access to a good law library and contacts in legal academia to assist in publication efforts and serve as mentors. Additionally most law schools employ legal research and writing instructors who teach first-year classes on research and writing.

## Qualifications of the Successful Candidate

Typically, the most important factors in hiring decisions are publications, strong faculty recommendations, and well-demonstrated academic and scholarly interests. Judicial clerkship and law journal experience is also beneficial.

Publications and demonstrated strong writing and research abilities are often the most important qualification of successful candidates. Therefore, law school is a great time for students to find what interests them and to see how much they enjoy legal research and writing.

Prior teaching experience is not required for pursuing work in law teaching but it can be helpful. Three or four references are standard for a law professor application. The best references will be law school faculty who know a candidate’s work

Although practice experience is generally an asset in the law teaching market, candidates with four or more years of practice experience may find the transition into law teaching challenging. This typi-

cally stems from the fact that while practicing they have not had a chance to create recent academic publications, and in some cases they may not have maintained relationships with law faculty who could serve as recommenders.

Alternatively, if a candidate is interested in clinical teaching, significant practice experience is desired. Candidates who have less than three or four years of practice experience are rarely considered in the clinical teaching market.

## AALS Faculty Recruitment Conference

Alumni who are considering attending the Association of American Law Schools' Faculty Recruitment Conference should register for the conference at [www.aals.org/frs](http://www.aals.org/frs) and prepare four documents to present to potential employers — a one-page résumé, a multi-page curriculum vitae, a scholarly agenda, and one significant legal publication. The Faculty Appointments Register requires applicants to complete standardized information for recruiters in five categories — personal, education experience, teaching experience (including teaching preferences and geographic restrictions), employment and publications, and bar admissions and references.

Candidates should also draft and upload a one-page résumé in July so that it can be included in the first mailing by the AALS in August. Like all professional résumés, the academic résumé should be accurate, highlight academic achievement, and be tailored to the position sought. The one page résumé should include the following categories: education, including grades, rank, law review or journal, honors and awards; law employment, including judicial clerkship(s); teaching interests and experience; publications; and references.

## The Academic CV and Scholarly Agenda

While the AALS imposes a one-page limit for the online FAR system, successful applicants will also provide schools with a three- to four-page curriculum vitae. The CV should include the following sections:

- employment (including academic and clerkship positions);
- education;
- grants and fellowships;
- publications (including works in progress available on SSRN);
- presentations (including invited talks, professional audiences, and panels);
- teaching experience;
- professional activities (including memberships in bar and academic associations);
- other employment; bar admissions; and
- languages.

## The Scholarly Agenda

One key to landing an entry-level legal academic position is a candidate's "scholarly agenda," i.e., a methodology and set of linked problems that the candidate plans to tackle as a scholar. The scholarly agenda is both an actual scholarship plan that a candidate can discuss and a short document. Drafting the scholarly agenda will assist candidates in organizing their thoughts. One recommended method for drafting the agenda suggests that candidates consider the papers they have written and intend to write as well as the common themes that run throughout the papers. If common themes are not readily identifiable, then it may be wise to modify medium-term scholarly plans so as to present a more coherent package. No one will treat a candidate's scholarly agenda as set in stone.

Law school hiring committees want to see that a candidate has a sense of what it takes to succeed as a scholar.

## Interviews

Interviews at the Faculty Recruitment Conference will last 30 minutes and candidates will meet with several members of the faculty recruitment committee. Interviews at the FRC usually will be a rigorous examination of the candidate's intellectual capabilities. Candidates should review all of their written work and prepare to discuss it in depth. A standard approach is to take a topic the candidate may know and explore it. Candidates should also be prepared to discuss other recent work on the same topic. The faculty committee will determine which candidates will be invited back to present a scholarly paper, i.e. "job talk," to the faculty of the law school as a whole.

At the "job talk," candidates should be prepared to discuss their teaching interests, publications, and research projects. Preparation of the scholarly agenda will assist in developing a coherent and concise statement of the thesis of a candidate's most recent scholarly research. Many schools host mock "job talks" for alumni preparing to go into the teaching market. At some schools, candidates are permitted to complete their 15- to 20-minute talk and then are asked questions by the faculty for 30 to 40 minutes. At other schools candidates are peppered with questions throughout their presentation not unlike an appellate argument. Hiring decisions are voted on by the faculty as a whole and require a greater than majority of the faculty. The season for hiring begins as soon as a week after the FRC and extends into February. Occasionally, schools will hire for unexpected vacancies later in April and May.

## Offers

Many schools will allow candidates to hold their offers open until they have completed their job talks at all the schools that invited them for

on-campus interviews. There is an increasing trend of schools giving offers with fixed expiration dates as schools try to fill their open positions with their top candidates. As in other contexts with exploding offers, candidates need to weigh the position offered against the likelihood that a more desirable offer is forthcoming.

## Resources

- AALS Faculty Recruitment Services (<http://www.aals.org/frs/index.html>)
- AALS Statistical Report on Law Faculty ([http://aals.org.cnchost.com/resources\\_statistical.php](http://aals.org.cnchost.com/resources_statistical.php))
- Uncloaking Law School Hiring: A Recruit's Guide to the AALS Faculty Recruitment Conference (<http://www.aals.org/frs/jle/index.html>)
- Breaking into the Academy: The 2002-2004 Michigan Journal of Race & Law Guide for Aspiring Law Professors (<http://students.law.umich.edu/mjrl/guide/Guide.pdf>)
- The Big Rock Candy Mountain: How to Get a Job in Law Teaching (<http://ww3.lawschool.cornell.edu/faculty-pages/wendel/teaching.htm>)
- Bibliography of Resources for Teaching Law (<http://www.nesl.edu/library/teachingbib.cfm>)
- Brian Leiter's Law School Reports (<http://www.leiterrankings.com/jobs/index.shtml>)

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