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# Study of Experiential Learning Opportunities in Law School: A Comparison of Responses from Law Firm Associates and Public Service Lawyers

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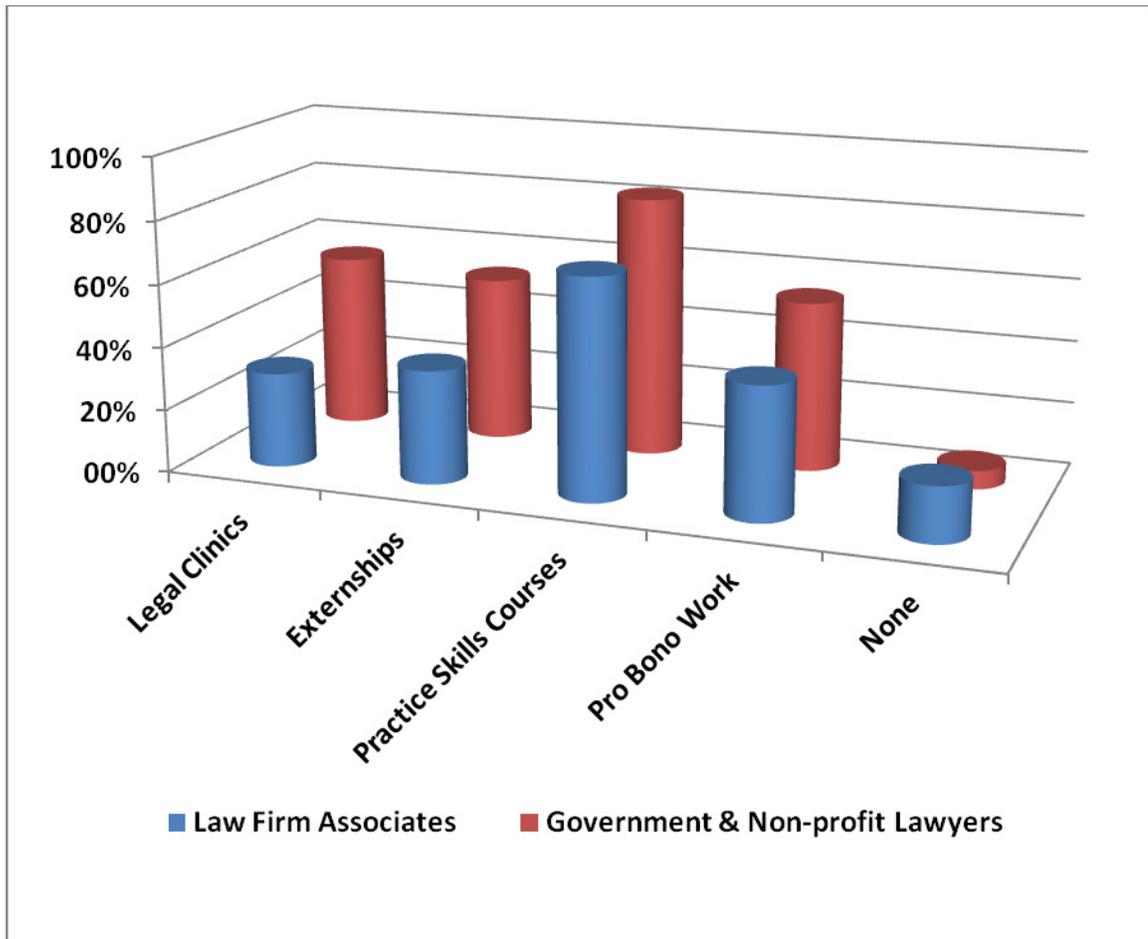
NALP and the NALP Foundation, along with members of NALP's Lawyer and Law Student Professional Development Work Groups, are excited to have been a part of a survey on participation in and the benefits of experiential learning opportunities offered in law schools. This project was launched in 2010 with a survey to law firm associates throughout the United States. Participants were asked to respond to a series of questions about participation in such experiential learning opportunities as legal clinics, externships, practice skills courses, and pro bono work. Respondents were also asked to rate the usefulness of these opportunities in preparing them for the practice of law. A similar survey was sent to lawyers practicing in government and nonprofit positions in 2011. Invitations to participate in both the associate and public service surveys were distributed electronically using the NALP membership list. A total of 930 law firm associates and 1,212 government and nonprofit lawyers provided partial or complete responses to the surveys. The results from both surveys have been published separately and are available through the NALP ([www.nalp.org](http://www.nalp.org)) and NALP Foundation ([www.nalpfoundation.org](http://www.nalpfoundation.org)) websites.

The findings from both surveys, on their own merits, are of great importance. This piece of writing, however, highlights some of the key comparisons between the responses received from law firm associates and public service lawyers regarding their participation in law school experiential learning opportunities and the perceived usefulness of these activities.

## ***Participation in Experiential Learning Opportunities***

For purposes of this study, experiential learning opportunities were divided into four categories: legal clinics, externships/field placements, practice skills courses, and pro bono work. As indicated in Graph 1 below, public service lawyers practicing in government or nonprofit positions were much more likely to have participated in each of the four categories of experiential learning activities than their law firm associate counterparts. For example, 55.5% of the responding public service lawyers reported that they participated in at least one legal clinic during law school while only 30.2% of law firm associates stated that they had taken part in a legal clinic. Similarly, 52.6% of public service lawyers participated in an externship or field placement compared to only 36.2% of associates. Participation levels of the two groups in practice skills courses and pro bono work were also comparable. Public service lawyers reported a participation level of almost 83% for practice skills courses and 54% for pro bono work, while the law firm associate participation levels for the two activities were 70% and 42.1%, respectively. Finally, only 5.9% of public services lawyers stated that they did not participate in any experiential learning courses or programs in law school. In contrast, 17.6% of the responding law firm associates did not take part in one of these opportunities.

**Graph 1: Participation in Experiential Opportunities**

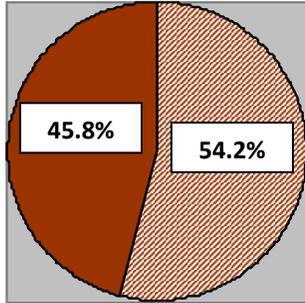


### ***Participation in Voluntary Pro Bono Work***

Findings regarding participation in pro bono work, specifically work done on a voluntary basis, between law firm associates and public service lawyers reveal some significant differences. Graphs 2 and 3 illustrate the level of participation in voluntary pro bono work as reported by the two groups. Over one half of the responding government and nonprofit lawyers (54.2%) stated that they had done pro bono work on a voluntary basis, while only 35.6% of law firm associates reported being involved in this type of public service work during law school.

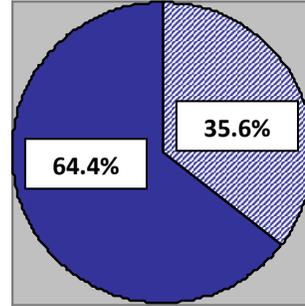
## Voluntary Participation in Pro Bono Work

**Graph 2: Public Service Lawyers**



Yes No

**Graph 3: Law Firm Associates**



Yes No

There were also notable differences in the number of volunteered pro bono hours worked between the two groups. Almost two thirds of the public interest lawyers (63.8%) reported that they had performed over 40 hours of pro bono work in law school, with over 37% stating that they had done more than 100 hours of pro bono work. For law firm associates, on the other hand, only 40.7% did more than 40 hours of pro bono work and just 17% worked more than 100 hours.

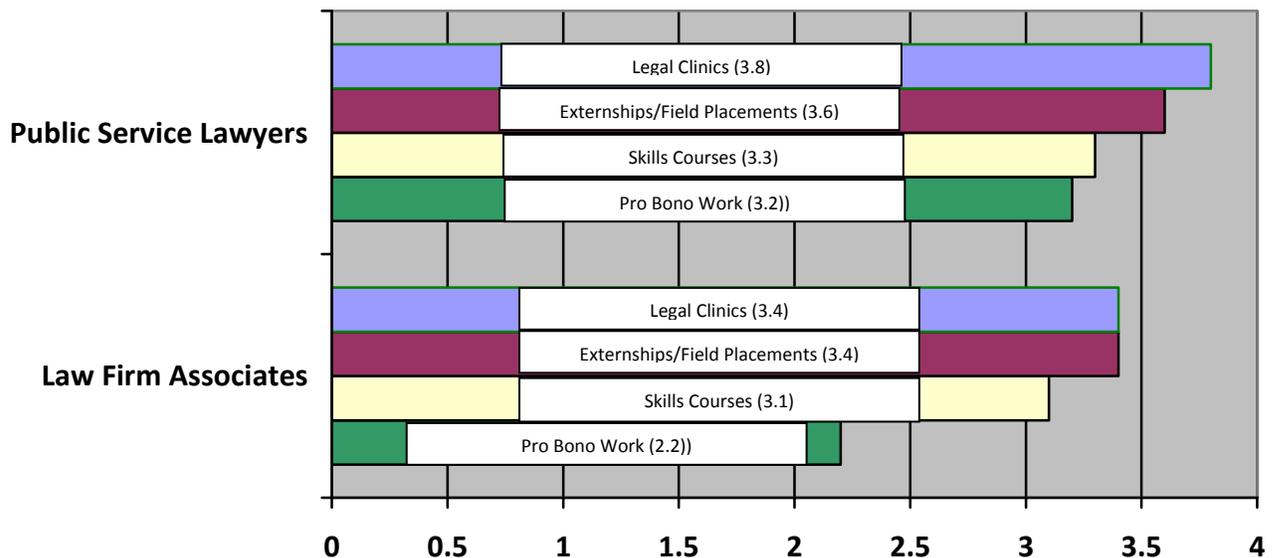
**Table 1: Number of Pro Bono Hours Volunteered During Law School**

Number of Hours Volunteered	Public Service Lawyers	Law Firm Associates
Less than 10 hours	8.4%	12.0%
10-20 hours	15.1	27.2%
21-40 hours	12.7	20.1%
41-60 hours	12.0	11.0%
61-80 hours	7.6	6.7%
81-100 hours	7.1	6.0%
More than 100 hours	37.1	17.0%

## Usefulness of Learning Experiences in Preparing for the Practice of Law

In addition to exploring participation in various experiential learning opportunities offered in law schools, this study also examined the “usefulness” of these courses as viewed by the responding lawyers. Survey participants were asked to rank each experiential program they took part in on a scale of 1-4, with 1 being “not at all useful” and 4 being “very useful.” Graph 4 below details the general “usefulness” rating for each of the opportunities examined in this study for both public service lawyers and law firm associates. Overall, public service lawyers rated each of the four types of experiential learning opportunities more “useful” than law firm associates. The highest rating was given to legal clinics by public service lawyers (3.8) and the lowest rating was given to pro bono work by law firm associates (2.2). While both groups gave pro bono work the lowest rating on the “usefulness” scale, public service lawyers considered the experience much more useful than law firm associates. Public service lawyers rated pro bono work 3.2 on the scale compared to the overall law firm associates rating of 2.2.

**Graph 4: Average Usefulness Rating**



Note: All figures are based on respondents who reported participating in the activity and rated its usefulness.