

Bridge-to-Practice Program Survey Findings for the Class of 2012

Introduction

NALP conducted its second survey of law school bridge-to-practice programs in Fall 2013 to collect information about these programs and employment outcomes for the Class of 2012. In contrast to the first survey on this topic, which focused primarily on the structure, size, and funding of the programs as implemented for the Class of 2011, the survey for the Class of 2012 focused mainly on employment outcomes for fellows, both as of February 15, 2013 and as of August 15, 2013. Surprisingly, although law schools continue to commit significant resources to these programs, many law schools are not tracking post-fellowship employment outcomes with any rigor, making it hard to assess the ultimate effectiveness of these programs.

Bridge-to-practice programs are designed to provide recent law school graduates with an opportunity to develop and enhance their practical legal skills as they transition into the practice of law, generally by providing funding of some sort for a period of post-graduate work *performed for a third party* (e.g., public interest organization, government agency, member of the judiciary, or private employer). Generally, jobs working for the graduate's law school (most commonly as a research assistant) do not rise to the level of bridge-to-practice fellowships. Exceptions include, for example, being paid for a job in one of the law school's legal clinics or in the office of the general counsel.

A total of 94 schools responded to the survey, representing all U.S. NALP regions, a range of sizes, and both public and private schools. Of these, 45, or 48%, reported having a bridge-to-practice program, as defined for this survey. It is likely that this percentage is not typical of the entire school population, however, as schools without such a program may have been less likely to participate in the survey even though the survey was designed to be applicable to all schools. It is also the case that the reported bridge-to-practice programs are more common among schools with 750 or more JD students and at private schools. For example, over half the schools with a bridge-to-practice program that responded to the survey have 750 or more students, and 60% are private schools. Almost two-thirds of schools with a bridge-to-practice program also characterized their school as being in a metropolitan area with a population of one million or more, and an additional 27%

characterized their school as being in a metropolitan area with a population of 100,000 – 999,999.

Consistent with the earlier survey, 27% of the programs date from 2007 or earlier; 11% started for the Class of 2008; 50% date from either 2009 or 2010, and the remaining 11% started in either 2011 or 2012. Of the respondents who did not have a program in place for the Class of 2012, the vast majority (87%) have never had a program; a few either discontinued the program prior to 2012 or implemented the program for the Class of 2013. Additional commentary on this question indicated that cost or lack of funding was a factor in discontinuing the program. One school reported that, instead of having a program specific to its school, they worked with the state bar to start a state-wide program. One school that had a program for 2012 graduates expects that it will not be able to fund a program for 2013.

Findings about 2012 Programs

- Fellowships are most often for 6 months or less, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Duration of Fellowships

3 months or less	37.8%
4-6 months	35.6
7-9 months	6.7
One year	6.7
Various/not preset	13.3

- Over half (51%) of programs provide part-time opportunities; just over one-third offer full-time opportunities; and for 13% of the programs the split is about even between the two. As the following comments suggest, some schools provided flexibility on these terms, whereas other schools had a more

defined set of full-time and part-time fellowships. (Some comments have been edited slightly for clarity.)

“We provided graduates a small stipend to work about 200 hours. It was up to the graduate to use the money as quickly or as slowly as they wished.”

“Fellows worked a maximum of 200 hours in total. Hours had the potential to be spread over 6 months but most were completed in 3 months.”

“We did not have a set time..... Most lasted 3 months, but some stretched into the 4-6 month period. We required a minimum number of hours, but encouraged grads to work more to get more benefit from the program. We did not track those excess hours — many employers required grads to do more than the minimum we required.”

“Fellows must complete 200 hours of service and may coordinate their schedule with the employer.”

“Four fellows worked full-time under one type of fellowship; 28 fellows worked between 15 and 30 hours a week under another fellowship.”

“Most of our bridge-to-practice positions were part-time (20 hours/week) judicial fellow positions for terms up to a maximum of 480 hours (about 6 months). In the end, we added a small number of 20 hour per week 3-month judicial fellow positions. We also funded a full-time fellow position with the Native American Rights Fund, which was for a term of about 3 months. Finally, we offered a corporate fellow position where we funded a grad to work full-time in a corporate legal department for about 8 weeks in the fall.”

Stipends

- About three-quarters of programs pay a stipend; about one-third pay an hourly wage, with some overlap because a few programs use both types of payments. Reported hourly wages, reported for 14 programs, ranged from \$10 to \$20 per hour, with a median of \$15 per hour. Stipend amounts covered a wide range with a median of \$1,175 per month as shown in Table 2 below. These figures include stipends for both part-time and full-time work.

Table 2. Monthly Stipends

Range of stipend amounts	\$400 – 3,750
Median amount	\$1,175
Average amount	\$1,594
Distribution (% of stipend amounts in each range)*	
\$800 or less	9.4%
\$1,000	37.5%
\$1,100 - 1,800	25.0%
\$2,000 - 3,750	28.1%
# of stipend amounts reported	32

* The ranges in the distribution portion of the table are not adjacent because the ranges are based on reported stipend amounts.

- Most programs — 77% — allow fellows to hold an additional part-time job during the fellowship. Commentary clarified that the part-time work was generally limited to a non-legal position. One school noted that additional earning was limited to \$7,000 per quarter.
- Just over one-quarter of programs offer professional development activities for fellows. Commentary on this topic suggests a variety of programs ranging from continuing meetings with counselors to receiving CLEs for professional development workshops. Several variations are described in these comments:

“Monthly meetings to discuss job search/professional development.”

“Counselor assigned to recent graduates, providing career and professional development.”

“Check-ins with the counselor/Director managing the program and mandatory PD sessions on negotiation skills, writing for practice, and creating professional networks.”

“They must meet twice with our Alumni Advisor for career advising sessions and they are encouraged to attend programs designed for recent graduates to improve their skills or network.”

“Fellows receive a wealth of benefits, including professional development workshops for which fellows receive up to 20 hours of continuing legal education credits and career development assistance in furthering the fellows’ career goals.”

“We had two bridge-to-practice fellowship programs: a judicial fellowship program and a fellowship program with a local city attorney’s office. Our judicial fellows were required to attend at least two professional development events (e.g., bar association, CLE, or legal community events that help build skills or connections) during the fellowship. Fellows were also required to meet with the dean of the law school and to attend a judicial networking reception.”

“There is an intensive training of the grads to represent pro se litigants in housing court. The grads are covered under a practice order that allows them to represent clients.”

“The school does not offer any professional development activities, but the host employers do.”

Funding Levels

- Total funding for the Class of 2012 ranged from \$5,000 to over \$1M per school, funding anywhere from a handful of fellows to over 100, with an average of 35 and a median of 32 fellows per school. Based on 42 schools reporting both the total number of fellows and funding levels, per capita amounts ranged from \$1,425 to over \$30,000. See Tables 3 and 4 below.

Table 3. Total Funding for the Class of 2012 (per school)

Range of funding	\$5,000 – 1,060,000
25th percentile	\$70,000
Median	\$186,600
75th percentile	\$300,000
Average	\$234,000

Table 4. Per Capita Funding for the Class of 2012

Range of funding	\$1,425 – 34,210
25th percentile	\$3,100
Median	\$4,950
75th percentile	\$8,820
Average	\$7,405

Note: Figures have been rounded to the nearest \$10.

- In comparing funding levels for 2012 with those for 2011, 43% of schools reported that funding had remained about the same; the remaining schools were about evenly split between those reporting an increase and those reporting a decrease. Among schools where funding decreased, the most commonly cited reason, cited by two-thirds of schools, was that there was less need for funding; one-third cited budget constraints; in just one instance lack of program effectiveness was noted.
- Consistent with the first survey, almost three-quarters of schools require some kind of report back from their fellows. Commentary suggests that the reporting

requirements are largely in line with what was reported on the first survey. For example, many schools require fellows to meet with their career counselor on a regular basis and to submit reports regularly, either in writing or via telephone. A report on job search activities may be required as part of the report. Some schools require timesheets signed by the supervising attorney. Some schools noted that they survey fellows at the end of their fellowship. A few schools spoke to changes in the reporting procedures. These comments capture the range of practices that schools reported:

“It has evolved to require graduates to create a personalized employment search plan at the beginning of every 3-month bridge fellowship, then report on progress toward that plan monthly, and then have a final exit interview.”

“It has significantly evolved — grads have to submit a monthly log, as well as a report about their job search progress. They also have to complete a post-Bridge survey, which gives us information about whether fellowships led to full-time work, the benefits, etc.”

“At the conclusion of the fellowship, each fellow was required to submit a one- to two-page written report indicating which two professional development events were attended and describing: (1) the type of work performed during the fellowship, (2) how the fellowship benefited the fellow’s career, (3) what skills the fellow developed or honed during the fellowship, and (4) any feedback for the law school on the fellowship program or observations about the value of the program to the school or the community. At least one substantial writing sample is written by the fellow during the course of the fellowship.”

“Fellows are required to have two counseling appointments, either in person or via phone, with their career counselor during their fellowship. They are also required to report on their job search via bi-weekly surveys, as well as to report permanent employment. The bi-weekly surveys were added this year.”

Placements and Employment Outcomes

- A total of 40 schools reported on the placements of their 2012 fellows. Placements continue to be heavily, but not exclusively, with government and public interest organizations, as shown in Table 5 below. Note that not all programs fund positions in all sectors. For example, about one-quarter of schools each indicated that funding does not cover in-house positions or positions in law firms. A few schools did not fund judicial clerkships.

Table 5. Employer/Job Types for Class of 2012 Fellows

Employer/Job Type	% of Total
Government	31.4%
Public interest	44.0
Judicial clerk	11.3
Law firm	9.1
Corporate in-house*	1.1
Other**	3.1
Total number of fellows	1,435

* Includes in-house at hospitals.

** Others described include law school legal clinic, law school in-house, nonprofits and nonprofit foundation, international NGO, and international tribunal.

- A total of 35 schools reported on the status of some or all of their fellows as of February 15, 2013, the “as of” date for both NALP’s graduate employment survey and reporting to the ABA. At that time 45% of fellows were still in their fellowship, and 24% were employed full-time long-term either with their fellowship employer or in a related position but with a different employer. See Table 6.

Table 6. Employment Outcomes for Class of 2012 Fellows as of February 15, 2013

Still in fellowship	45.5%
Employed with fellowship employer in a full-time long-term job	9.4
Employed in a related field in a full-time long-term job but not with the fellowship employer	14.5
Employed with the fellowship employer or in a related field on a short-term basis	3.5
Employed with other employer — any terms	14.8
Pursuing LLM or other advanced studies full-time	0.3
Not employed	9.4
Status unknown	2.6
Number of fellows	1,212

Note: “Related” means that there is a connection or similarity between the kind of work done or subject matter expertise in the fellowship and the new job.

- A total of 30 schools reported on the status of some or all of their fellows as of August 15, 2013, or about 15 months after a May graduation. (These figures do not include schools that reported that the status of all of their fellows was unknown.) At that point, about 42% of fellows were employed full-time long-term either with their fellowship employer or in a related position. However, in these 30 schools, the status of one-quarter of the fellows was not known. See Table 7.
- Compared with the total number of fellows reported by 40 schools — 1,435 — the status of almost half of them (46%) was not known as of August 15, 2013.

Table 7. Employment Outcomes for Class of 2012 Fellows as of August 15, 2013

Still in fellowship	8.1%
Employed with fellowship employer in a full-time long-term job	12.5
Employed in a related field in a full-time long-term job but not with the fellowship employer	29.6
Employed with the fellowship employer or in a related field on a short-term basis	1.7
Employed with other employer — any terms	18.5
Pursuing LLM or other advanced studies full-time	0.4
Not employed	3.2
Status unknown	26.0
Number of fellows	1,051