

LL.M. ADVISOR 101

Download this resource at
www.nalp.org/careerservices



National Association for Law Placement (NALP)

1220 19th Street NW, Suite 401

Washington, DC 20036-2405

Phone: (202) 835-1001

www.nalp.org

Welcome

Congratulations on your position as an advisor to Master of Laws (LL.M.) students! Whether you have years of experience as a career advisor to other student populations or are just beginning your career in the field, you will find that advising LL.M. students not only presents special challenges but also offers unique rewards.

This manual provides a general introduction to LL.M. career advising. It assumes that you have a basic familiarity with the system of legal education in the United States.

Why Do Students Seek an LL.M. Degree? What Are Typical Employment Prospects?

Who are your students?

U.S. law schools award the Master of Laws degree to students who already have earned a basic law degree, whether that basic degree is the Juris Doctor (J.D.), most common in the U.S. (and increasingly common in some other jurisdictions as well), the Bachelor of Laws (LL.B.), or other law degrees awarded in other countries. This fact alone means that LL.M. students often differ from J.D. students in their work, life experience and motivations for seeking the degree.

LL.M. students generally fall into one of two broad categories: U.S.-trained and non-U.S.-trained (foreign-trained) attorneys.

U.S.-Trained

The first category of LL.M. students can be found in “specialty” programs that focus on a specific area of the law (for example, tax, banking and financial institutions, environmental, or intellectual property). These LL.M. students can be students with legal or non-legal work

experience who wish to increase their level of expertise in their area of practice or students who are hoping to increase their job prospects in a practice area in which they have little to no experience. These students all possess J.D. degrees from U.S. law schools and have already been admitted to the bar or are eligible to take the bar examination in the state(s) in which they wish to work. (Schools that do not offer specialty LL.M. programs will not see a large U.S.-trained LL.M. population.)

Depending on your law school, U.S.-trained LL.M. students may not be eligible to participate in On-Campus Interviewing (OCI) programs geared toward entry-level or campus hiring of J.D. students. Due to the unavailability of entry-level OCI programs, the job search process for U.S.-trained LL.M. students is much closer to lateral hiring, which can disadvantage students who have no work experience. Even for students with work experience, hiring often occurs on an “as-needed” basis and there is no set timeline for recruitment.

Non-U.S.-Trained

The second category of LL.M. students consists of “non-U.S.-trained” or “foreign-trained” lawyers who often are citizens of other countries and who do not have a J.D. degree from an accredited U.S. law school. These students often wish to earn an LL.M. degree in order to sit for a bar examination in the U.S.; carry an extra credential in their home countries; and/or experience living, studying, and working in the U.S. for at least a limited time. A small but significant number of these foreign-trained LL.M. students are seeking long-term legal employment in the U.S., either because they are U.S. citizens or permanent residents or because for personal reasons they would prefer not to return to their home country.

Foreign-trained LL.M. students vary in their background. Some of these students are licensed in their home countries and have significant legal work experience, while others have recently obtained an undergraduate degree in law, with no professional experience and the LL.M. program is their first exposure to the U.S. legal system and legal practice.

For this category of international attorneys, there is a limited number of employers who will consider hiring

foreign-trained LL.M. students for permanent positions, while other employers, typically law firms, might hire foreign-trained LL.M. students only for short-term positions such as “visiting associates” or “foreign associates.” Other employers categorically refuse to hire LL.M. students who do not hold U.S. work authorization through citizenship or permanent resident status. Foreign-trained LL.M. students who wish to find internships or employment in the U.S. typically face a challenging job search along with two other issues: licensure and visa status.

Bar Exam

First, you should explain to LL.M. students whose previous training was not in the U.S. that they cannot practice law in the U.S. without first being licensed in the jurisdiction in which they wish to practice; licensure requires that they sit for the bar exam in that jurisdiction; and the bar examiners in each jurisdiction require that applicants meet certain requirements to sit for the bar exam. For some students from jurisdictions where admission to the bar is seen as an important credential but may not be required to practice law in certain settings — in-house at a corporation, for example — it is important they understand that passing the bar exam and being admitted to the bar in the U.S. is a licensure requirement to practicing law in that jurisdiction.

Because most jurisdictions require the applicant to hold a J.D. degree from an accredited U.S. law school, non-U.S. trained LL.M. students are not eligible to sit for the bar exam in every jurisdiction. Even states — most notably New York and California — that allow applicants to sit for the bar exam without a J.D. degree from an accredited U.S. law school impose other requirements such that the LL.M. degree by itself may not be sufficient to allow the student to sit for the bar exam. These requirements may relate, for example, to the student’s first law degree, and some students will discover that they do not meet the minimum requirements and thus cannot sit for the bar exam even if they complete an LL.M. program.

You may find that some foreign-trained LL.M. students enter the program with the belief that it will allow them to sit for the bar exam in one or more jurisdictions and will ask you for advice about applying for different jurisdictions’ bar exams or submitting petitions to bar

examiners after receiving notices that they are not permitted to sit for the exams. Different law schools have different policies regarding the extent to which you should assist such students. In any case, you should have a general understanding of which jurisdictions are more “friendly” to foreign-trained LL.M. student applicants and what other requirements those jurisdictions impose. The National Conference of Bar Examiners publishes a Comprehensive Guide to Bar Admission Requirements, available at www.ncbex.org, that contains a summary of the different jurisdictions’ requirements.

Visa Issues for International LL.M. Students

Second, LL.M. students who are not United States citizens or permanent residents must understand what visa status options are available to them following the completion of their studies. Many LL.M. students study in the United States under an F-1 visa — this includes both foreign-trained LL.M. students as well as U.S.-trained LL.M. students who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents. The F-1 visa comes with work restrictions and potential work authorizations: Students on the F-1 visa may work up to 20 hours per week on campus during their studies. In addition to working on campus, students can use Curricular Practical Training (CPT) to work or intern off campus during their studies and students can apply for Optional Practical Training (OPT) to allow them to work or intern in the U.S. for up to twelve months after graduation. Non-citizens seeking to work in the United States for a longer period of time typically must find employers to sponsor their work visas, typically through the H-1B visa for workers in specialty occupations.

- ✓ **CPT:** This work authorization comes as part of the F-1 student visa. Federal regulations give general guidance for schools, but CPT policies vary from school to school and even within different programs at the same school. Generally speaking, it must be an “integral part of an established curriculum” and is defined to be “alternative work/study, internship, cooperative education, or any other type of required internship or practicum that is offered by sponsoring

employers through cooperative agreements with the school.” CPT normally requires the student to have been enrolled for a full academic year, but an exception can be made for students enrolled in graduate studies that require immediate participation in CPT.

- ✓ **OPT:** This form of work authorization through the F-1 student visa allows for up to twelve months of work authorization after graduation from the program. The employment must be in a position related to the student’s field of study but does not have to be paid employment — students may use OPT for unpaid internships or volunteer positions but must work for at least 20 hours per week to count as employment. Students do not need a job offer to apply for OPT.
- ✓ **The H-1B Visa:** H-1B visas allow U.S. employers to employ workers in specialty occupations. The visa status is attached to the sponsor employer; an employee holding an H-1B visa is permitted to change employers but the new employer must file a new H-1B petition on behalf of the employee. For LL.M. students wishing to find long-term employment in the U.S., finding an employer willing to sponsor them for the H-1B visa is crucial. Unfortunately there is a nationwide cap on the number of visas issued and a lottery system in place to award visas, which means even finding an employer sponsor does not guarantee receiving the visa through the lottery.

As with bar exam requirements, this can be a thorny area that law schools may address in different ways. You may be part of a broader university with an international office that handles student visa issues. Regardless of whether you are expected to do this, you should develop a basic familiarity with the visa categories, eligibility, and limitations and how they might affect your students’ career options. In addition, U.S. employers are not typically familiar with work authorization through CPT and OPT, and you can work with students and through employer outreach to educate employers about the possibility of short-term employment of LL.M. students using CPT or OPT. However, although general advice is appropriate and often necessary, be careful to never provide specific legal counsel on visa issues.

Goals and Expectations of the Advisor

While you certainly will find advising LL.M. students to be rewarding, you also may find certain aspects to be frustrating unless you work to maintain a proper perspective on your role as an advisor. In particular, for the reasons outlined throughout this manual, LL.M. students can face challenging or frustrating job searches and may not find that their results meet the expectations they held when they entered the program.

A new LL.M. career advisor can easily fall into the trap of viewing LL.M. placement statistics as the sole indicator of performance. Remember that your role is to provide the same level of career advising services to your different LL.M. populations and that those services consist of teaching them career skills and helping them find and take advantage of opportunities. Your role is not to do all of the work of a job search for each of your students or to ensure that each of them graduates with their ideal job (or any job) in hand.

Even in a good economy, a large number, if not the majority, of your foreign-trained LL.M. students will not find a position in the U.S. that seems commensurate with their experience back home. This is a reality of the legal job market and not a reflection of your performance. Your U.S.-trained LL.M. students may be similarly frustrated that most employers do not recruit LL.M. students the same way or with the same vigor that they recruit J.D. students. Another way to think of your role is to take the long view: by teaching career skills and helping your students think about their career goals, you are preparing them for embarking on and establishing a meaningful professional life that probably will span at least several different jobs, if not careers.

Student Programming

Given the condensed timeline of LL.M. programs, deadlines for participating in OCI programs during the fall and the need to get students comfortable with the role networking will play in their job search process, you should start working with your students as soon

as possible, and you can even consider starting your technical programming as early as the summer before students arrive on campus through the use of podcasts and webinars.

Although LL.M. programming practices vary among schools and there are many different ways to structure successful programming, some topics you should consider covering during the summer are: an introduction to your services and the job search process for LL.M. students, crafting effective résumés and cover letters — including how to transform a curriculum vitae into a U.S.-style legal résumé for foreign-trained LL.M. students, researching employers, alumni and other practitioners and networking and informational interviewing skills. Depending on the LL.M. programs at your school, you may hold separate programs on these topics for each of your different LL.M. populations (for example, one résumé workshop for your specialty LL.M. students and another for your foreign-trained LL.M. students).

You may also work on other programming more appropriate for the fall and spring semesters, such as mock interviews, receptions, visa workshops, alumni or practice area panels, and on-campus interviewing.

Meeting with Students

Once you have begun your student programming you also likely will begin to meet with your students individually. Your initial meeting may also be the first time you have interacted with the student individually. If so, take advantage of this meeting: rather than jumping straight to guidance on her job search process, use this opportunity to get to know the student by asking about her background, goals, and experience so far in what often is an unfamiliar place. Foreign-trained LL.M. students in particular may be dealing with some culture shock in addition to being far away from their family, friends, and support systems back home and may appreciate your extra efforts to make them feel welcome. Learning about the student and establishing rapport not only will help you to better tailor your advice to that student throughout the year but also can be one of the most enjoyable aspects of your job.

Managing Expectations

This initial meeting with a student is a good time to begin managing expectations about what the job search process will look like for them. For U.S.-trained LL.M. students, it means talking about the difference between the LL.M. and J.D. job search and discussing how factors like the strength of their J.D. institution, their prior work experience, and academic performance all play an important role in their job search process. You will also need to explain to them that the demand for LL.M. students in specialty programs is not seasonal and their job search will involve a year-round effort that is highly subject to the current state of the legal job market and emphasizing networking as discussed below. For foreign-trained LL.M. students, managing expectations will mean making a student aware that employer demand for lawyers who do not hold J.D. degrees is often based on specific countries of first law degree, language skills, very specialized work experience, and business relationships.

Reviewing Student Résumés and Other Application Materials

One of the services that nearly all LL.M. advisors provide is working with students on creating and editing a résumé and cover letter. Your career office may have a suggested template for students to use for these documents, or you may review other resources and produce your own template or sample résumés for your students.

Many of your U.S.-trained LL.M. students will already have a résumé that conforms at least generally to the expectations of legal employers in the U.S.; in contrast, you will find that most of your foreign-trained LL.M. students use a curriculum vitae (C.V.) that is much different in form and substance from the U.S. style legal résumé. (For example, you will find that some students include their photos, birthdays, and marital/family status on their C.V.) If your programming includes a résumé workshop, you will have explained the differences in approach between a C.V. and a résumé and the standard organization and style of a résumé. You might suggest at your résumé workshop that students who wish to meet with you to discuss résumés or cover letters first send you copies of their drafts to review before the meeting;

this will allow you to focus your meeting time on your suggestions and any necessary reinforcement of the ideas you presented in your résumé workshop.

Similarly, try to understand (either by prior research or by asking your students) how the legal education and qualification systems work in your foreign-trained LL.M. students' home countries, because the differences from the U.S. systems will impact what types of information are relevant to include on a résumé. For example, if your student comes from a country where a very large number of students study law as an undergraduate degree but only a tiny percentage are able to pass the bar, then details of the student's performance on the bar exam are more relevant than they are in the U.S. An extremely useful reference in this area is the International Directory of Lawyer Qualification; a third edition of this directory was published in 2018 by the NALP Foundation at www.nalpfoundation.org.

Facilitating Networking

Because LL.M. students generally cannot rely on OCI or other structured programs to find jobs, networking is perhaps the most important part of their job search strategy. For both groups of LL.M. students, because employer demand can be so variable, you should emphasize the importance of networking and the role it plays in helping students access opportunities that are not otherwise posted or giving LL.M. students a competitive edge when being assessed alongside J.D. candidates. For foreign-trained LL.M. students specifically, it is important to discuss networking in the context of not only accessing opportunities, but of gaining greater understanding of and facility with the U.S. legal market and building a network of practitioners in the U.S. These skills and experiences can be an invaluable component to a student's LL.M. studies even if he or she returns to their home country after graduation.

For many LL.M. students who might be new to networking in the United States, you will need to create teaching tools about the basics of obtaining informational interviews and other networking techniques. One helpful resource you can create for students is a set of scripts to

use for a variety of networking scenarios — from crafting the initial e-mail asking for an informational interview to following up with someone they have met at a reception. Students new to networking will appreciate having some sample language and vocabulary to use as they begin to reach out to contacts. It can also be useful to have a workshop where you walk through different networking situations — meeting up at a coffee shop, breaking into a pre-existing conversation at a cocktail reception — so students can observe what a typical interaction looks like before having to embark on one of their own.

In addition to teaching the basics of networking skills, you can also take steps to facilitate networking opportunities for students. First, past graduates can be great allies in the job search, including by providing insights about the job search process and work at a particular employer and possibly by assisting the students in communicating with other employees in key positions in that organization or in other organizations. As an LL.M. advisor, you can work to cultivate ties between your school and LL.M. alumni in order to identify those alumni who would be willing and able to assist students. You might even consider making a list of such alumni and their contact information available to your students (with the consent of those alumni). For foreign-trained LL.M. students who may not be as familiar with LinkedIn or other forms of career related social networking, having an easily accessible list of alumni volunteers who have already agreed to speak with students can be an easier introduction to networking.

Second, you might propose one or more receptions during the academic year at which students and alumni can meet in a somewhat more social atmosphere for networking purposes. Naturally, this would require some institutional support on the part of your school (especially if hosted at the school or if the event otherwise would result in a financial commitment). In time you might find that employers would be interested in sending representatives as well, in order to meet not only current students but also the alumni who attend. In addition to social networking events, you can also create more substantive programs and panels with practitioners and other speakers on areas of interest to your students. While the stated purpose of these programs will not be explicitly networking, it will help your students understand that

networking is an ongoing process that can happen in any setting.

Understand that some of the students in international LL.M. programs may find these networking opportunities to be strange or uncomfortable. While contacts are valuable in any culture, the idea that a student could request an informational interview from a stranger — and that the stranger might be happy to accept — may be counterintuitive to some students. At the least, they may be unsure of exactly how to go about making these requests or conducting themselves at some of the networking events; be prepared to offer guidance and support. This support can be in the form of attending networking events with students to facilitate their interactions with strangers or offering guidance by being available, through short appointments or drop-in office hours, to answer questions about the wording of informational interview request e-mails. It is important to remember that networking in the form we are familiar with is an entirely new concept for even some of your more experienced and sophisticated students.

On-Campus Interviewing and Résumé Collections

Whereas OCI can be a focus of the job search process for J.D. students, it often is much different for LL.M. students. Most employers visiting a school during July/August OCI are forecasting hiring needs and looking for entry-level candidates to fill those needs several years out. Those employers may intend that their OCI process fill all their hiring needs for entry- or junior-level attorneys. Because specialty LL.M. students graduate the following spring and thus do not fit this timeline, most employers choose not to interview specialty LL.M. students during fall OCI. Similarly, employers typically do not intend to evaluate candidates for non-associate positions at August/ September OCI, and thus foreign-trained LL.M. students typically do not interview for “visiting associate” positions then. Furthermore, depending on the timing of the OCI period, the LL.M. students may not have even begun the program and, of course, do not have any LL.M. grades to share with employers.

When an employer has a need for an entry-level or junior attorney in a specific practice area and has not filled its need through the July/August OCI process, it may look to students in relevant specialty LL.M. programs. The employer may wish to conduct on-campus interviews or may prefer that you collect résumés (and perhaps additional documents) from interested students and make them available to the employer. Similarly, an employer may be looking for a foreign-trained LL.M. student with certain qualifications (often including some combination of type of practice, country where qualified as a lawyer, and language abilities) and may request to schedule interviews or to receive résumés from interested students.

Job Fairs and Off-Campus Interviewing

Given that most employers visit campus to interview J.D. students and not LL.M. students, your school may participate in off-campus interview programs or job fairs for your LL.M. students. Several consortia exist to sponsor such interview programs for specific populations, such as the International Student Interview Program hosted by N.Y.U., the Columbia Overseas-Trained LL.M. Student Interview Program, and the West Coast International LL.M. Job Fair hosted by U.C.L.A. and similar interview days focused on specialty LL.M. programs in particular fields — for example, the Taxation Interview Program co-hosted by Georgetown Law and the New York University School of Law, and the Tax Attorney Recruiting Event co-hosted by Boston University, University of Florida and Northwestern. If your school does participate in one of these, be sure to contact your counterpart at the host school as early as possible so that you can learn of important deadlines and be included in all communications.

Marketing and Employer Outreach

You may find that you focus much of your time and energy on counseling your students and on the administrative tasks inherent in your job, but do not overlook the need

Sample Timeline

Although schools and career services offices operate in varying ways, you may find that your calendar as an LL.M. advisor follows this timeline:

June/July/August — Work with graduates who are continuing their job searches, hold webinars on the job search process for incoming LL.M. students and on résumé and cover letters, plan fall programming for incoming class, and conduct employer outreach.

September/October — Hold programs and workshops, including additional résumé workshops, and begin individual meetings to work with students on résumés and cover letters. If your school participates in job fairs, student application deadlines for those often begin in November, and thus it will be critical that they begin work on their résumés early in the academic year. These months, along with January, likely will be your busiest.

November — Continue individual meetings with students. If your school participates in job fairs, students may be working on submitting résumés and/or cover letters for those starting this month, which requires additional guidance from you.

December — Students are focused on final exams, and you likely will find your meeting schedule to be much less full. Communicate with students regarding job search strategies for their winter break.

January/February — Students return to school and often are re-focused on their job searches, so expect increased student meeting requests. Job fairs typically are held in January and February, requiring additional planning and administrative actions as well as additional time helping students to prepare for interviews.

March/April/May — Continue counseling students about their job searches. As graduation approaches, students without jobs will feel higher levels of stress and anxiety about their searches. Contact any students with whom you have not spoken during this time to inquire how they are doing and ask if they would like to meet to discuss their search strategies. Increase your focus on keeping placement records fully up to date.

to establish and maintain connections with potential employers of your students. You should consider different methods of marketing your program and your students to potential employers.

Part of this process involves familiarizing yourself with the potential market for your students. What types of employers have hired LL.M. students from your program or other programs in the past (e.g., accounting firms for tax students)? This is another way in which your LL.M. alumni or adjunct faculty can be a great asset. Is there a market for your students that has no pipeline but logically could? This might be the case for your specialty LL.M. students in particular.

Once you have identified employers you believe could be interested in your LL.M. students (even if not in the current year), consider trying to schedule a marketing visit (particularly if your J.D. advisor colleagues in your office do these already) or at least trying to establish e-mail or telephone contact with the appropriate people at those employers.

Do employers in the field typically send representatives to meetings of bar sections or associations? If so, consider whether attending these also could be worthwhile.

After setting up meetings or conversations with potential employers, think about what you want the conversation to cover and what you could ask of them beyond considering your students for potential opportunities. Many U.S. employers will not be familiar with

the breadth and depth of students represented by LL.M. programs. You will need to educate them about the LL.M. candidate pool and what the candidates are seeking.

One of the differences in J.D. hiring and LL.M. hiring for specialty students is the inability to conduct an “on the job” interview the same way a summer internship or a summer associate position would allow. Consider setting up internship, externship or work study partnerships with potential employers that will allow students to spend some time working with an employer during the semester.

For many foreign-trained LL.M. students, the goal is to get some U.S. work experience through the program. Think creatively about what this may mean and how you can enhance opportunities for students. For example, through CPT work authorization, your LL.M. students might be able to work on practical legal matters for ten to fifteen hours a week through an externship or practicum class that has been facilitated through the law school. OPT work authorization allows you to set up more formal post-graduate fellowship or internship type programs with employers.

Resources

NALP and Other Advisors

The other advisors in your office may be helpful in your transition to your new role, especially with advice about general student counseling issues, but you may also find yourself somewhat isolated in your role as LL.M. advisor because of the differences in hiring patterns between LL.M. students and J.D. students. Be sure to join your counterparts in NALP’s International and Advanced

Degree Advising and Recruiting Section and join the related e-mail discussion list (visit www.nalp.org and click on “Sections, Groups, and Committees” under the “Community” tab to sign up), and do not hesitate to contact your counterparts for advice and resources. You will find that we as LL.M. advisors face many of the same issues and can be invaluable resources to each other.

If your school will support your trip to the NALP Annual Education Conference (held each spring), it can be a great opportunity to meet the other LL.M. advisors, learn new skills or tools, and re-energize. The International and Advanced Degree Advising and Recruiting Section also runs a robust Twitter feed with links to articles and other resources that would be of interest to both LL.M. students and advisors. You can follow the Twitter feed at www.twitter.com/nalpllmintl.

Non-NALP Resources

The Chronicle of Higher Education (www.chronicle.com) contains useful articles about the world of colleges and universities and of particular interest to LL.M. advisors, tracks trends involving international students. GoinGlobal (www.goinglobal.com) offers career and employment resources for helping students of all kinds find opportunities in the United States and abroad. In particular, there is an H-1B search engine that allows users to identify U.S. employers that have filed H-1B visa applications in the past. This resource is especially helpful for international students who are seeking employer sponsorship for work authorization. Additionally, GoinGlobal offers the ability to search country guides with information on work permits and visa regulations and application materials for non-U.S. positions.

This manual was initially prepared in 2009 by a work group of the NALP International and Advanced Degree Advising and Recruiting Section headed by Section Chair Elise Luce Kraemer (University of Pennsylvania Law School) and including Ian T. Kelly (Northwestern University School of Law), Jessica Richman Dworkin (The Ohio State University Moritz College of Law), and Sandra P. Buteau (Georgetown University Law Center) and significantly updated in 2019 by Shujun Tian (Georgetown University Law Center). © December 2019. National Association for Law Placement, Inc. All rights reserved.