

NALP Newcomers: Counseling Alumni

Lisa Abrams and Leslie Scolnick Hauser, Directors of Career
Services

The University of Chicago Law School
November 18, 2009

Goal of Today's Call:

- **Practical ideas and procedures** for working with alumni
- **Reassurance:** You're *not* missing something!
- **You're not alone!** All law schools face the same challenges when working with alumni

Overview of today's call:

- Assess the **culture** of your school
- Decide **which services you can and can't provide** to alumni
- Develop **standard operating procedures**
- **How-to's of counseling alumni**
- **Your questions and concerns**

Assess the Culture of Your School

- First consider the **culture of your law school** and the **attitudes/values of its leaders**
 - **What priority are alumni given vs. students?**
 - **How are limited resources allocated in your office?**
 - **How do students and alumni currently view your office?**
 - **Where are your alumni located?**
 - **Is there more interest in group programming or individual counseling?**

Determine Your Office's Goals: What Can You Provide?

- **An overview of the legal market/current economy**
- **Listening ear:** reassurance and support
- **Share ideas and strategies/brainstorm**
- **Resources**
- **Teach specific skills**
 - Resume writing, cover letter strategies, interview coaching
- **Coordinate efforts with Alumni Relations and/or Development**

Possible Alumni Services. . .

- **Access to Symplicity/job postings** (and advice on their limitations)
- **Networking opportunities**
 - Information about alumni activities
 - Access to online alumni directory
 - Create specific alumni lists for graduates
- **List of resources** for conducting job search (books, websites, articles, recruiters, professional career counselors)
- **Resume/cover letter review** (and samples)
- **Individual counseling appointments**
- **Consultation with University career services**
- **Group programming**

Develop a Standard Procedure for Alumni Inquiries

- **Streamline** your process
 - Establish responsibilities in your office
- **Initial E-mail:** Clearly outline the services you provide
 - Explain how to get access to job postings
 - Provide links to the university alumni directory
 - Attach a list of general resources
 - Offer resume review and/or individual appointment
- **Provide info on your website**

More on Standard Procedures. . .

- **Resume/cover letter review**
 - Sample resumes and cover letters specifically for alumni
 - Use e-mail as a primary communication tool, marking suggestions using Track Changes in Word
- **Counseling appointments**
 - Require resume submission prior to appointment
 - May need to limit appointments during OCI, counseling of first years, or other busy periods

Counseling Appointments:

Strategies for Common Alumni Profiles

- **Recent graduates**
- **Junior associates laid off from law firms**
- **“The grass must be greener” attorneys**
- **Career changers/alternative/ non-traditional/ “you can do anything with a law degree”**

More Common Alumni Profiles

- **“Frequent flyers”** and serial visitors
- **“Should have been/could have been”** graduates
- **Returning to work after long absence**, or “I’ve never practiced but now I’m ready”
- Looking for **part-time** work

Alumni Counseling Appointments: 7 Steps for a 30 Minute Meeting

1. **Introductory open-ended questions**

- “Tell me how I can help you today.”
- “Tell me about your job search.”
- “Where are you in your job search process?”

Alumni Counseling Appointments: 7 steps for a 30 minute meeting, cont'd.

2. Listen and issue spot

- Does the graduate **understand the current legal market**?
- Does he/she have **realistic expectations**?
- Are there **time gaps in the resume** that need to be addressed?
- Does graduate **have the skills/attributes** to get the job they want?
- Are **anger/depression issues** involved?
- What are the **limitations/search parameters** for this graduate (salary needs, geography, practice specialty, bar membership)?

Alumni Counseling Appointments: 7 steps for a 30 minute meeting, cont'd.

3. **Reassurance and cheerleading**

- **Start with a positive statement**
- **Express reassurance:** “You are not alone,” “It’s certainly challenging to identify what you want in a job right now,” “I understand that you are quite frustrated”
- **Try to identify this graduate’s personal strengths**
 - Work skills listed in resume
 - Efforts made in the job search through networking or challenging their limitations

Alumni Counseling Appointments: 7 steps for a 30 minute meeting, cont'd.

4. **Deliver a reality check**

- **Often the hardest part!**
 - **It's not what the graduate wants to hear**
 - **We may not have the specific knowledge of the market or specialty, so we feel most vulnerable in our own skills**
- **Jobs are found through networking, not job postings or recruiters**
- **There is no one-stop shop for a job search**

Alumni Counseling Appointments:

7 steps for a 30 minute meeting, cont'd.

5. **Identify resources and brainstorm more specific recommendations**

- **Suggest books, websites, other resources** relevant to this alum's search (often the same as student resources)
- Encourage alum to **identify their network**
- Talk through what they are going to say to contacts:
“the elevator speech”

Alumni Counseling Appointments: 7 steps for a 30 minute meeting, cont'd.

6. **Prioritize assignments**

- Create a **“to do” list** with the graduate
- Break the job search into **small steps**
 - Next week, call two law school friends
 - In the next month, attend one bar association meeting
 - Each day, read local business newspaper/relevant blogs/specialized periodical
- **Send away with a specific assignment (make a note!)**
- **Ask the graduate to report back** on their progress

Alumni Counseling Appointments: 7 steps for a 30 minute meeting, cont'd.

7. **Conclude the appointment with more reassurance:**

- Highlight the **personal strengths** you've identified during the appointment
- Ask **graduate to confirm that they understand their next steps**
- **Mention you look forward to hearing of their progress** (they bear responsibility)
- Thank the graduate for thinking of their law school

Appreciate *What You CAN Do* *and Already Do* for Alumni. . .

- There is **no magic** way to counsel alumni: use the very same skills you've already developed with students
- **Be kind** to yourself: remember your limitations
 - Many factors beyond your office's services:
 - Alum's history with/experience during law school
 - Alum's emotional state, financial pressures etc.
 - A contracting and ever changing legal market
- Listening, providing reassurance and sharing new ideas and strategies goes a long way in **making alumni feel cared for.**

What are *Your* Questions and Concerns?

- What roadblocks are you encountering?
- What has worked/is working at your school?
- What advice do you have to share?