



## Alyssa Hammond, Esq., Director of Career Services, New England School of Law

[6-28-04 John J. Barnes]

**Among other things, Alyssa Hammond offers tips on how evening law students should focus their job searches in order to get on an equal footing with full-time law students in the job market.**

Not all law school career counseling centers are created equal. That's Alyssa Hammond's opinion and Alyssa knows of what she speaks.

"I'm a 1994 graduate of New England School of Law," she says, "and while I was a student, I had hardly any contact with the Career Services Office. A lot of students at the time assumed that the top students were the most marketable and so the Career Services people would prefer to work with them, and no one told us otherwise.

"I should add that the Massachusetts market is traditionally very tough for new law school graduates. There are six law schools here, each offering its graduates to employers in the area. In my case, it was 1994, during the last recession; the economy around here was bad and law firms were even cutting back and certainly hiring very few new graduates."

We asked Alyssa how she managed to get a job and she said she had clerked on a voluntary and paid basis for several small firms for six years before and during law school. Even though the firm that she worked for in her last year was downsizing, it hired her.

"I became a divorce lawyer. I had loved family law as a clerk and as a law student, and I had seen that people were helped by good lawyering and justice done. But as a practicing attorney, divorce law was different. There was a lot of antagonism. Over the course of two years, I realized that the practice of law, particularly family law, was not for me. "After some self-assessment, I decided I wanted to get into higher education adminis-

tration, but I had no experience. Volunteering had opened doors for me in the past, so I offered to volunteer at New England School of Law in the Admissions Department. A paid temporary position was available, and they offered it to me on the spot. By being in the law school, I became aware of other opportunities within the school and within three months, I was hired in the Career Services Office as their Recruitment Coordinator. Seven months later, I was promoted to Assistant Director, and a year and a half later, I was appointed the Director of Career Services. So, there is definitely something to be said for getting your foot in the door by volunteering."

We asked if she had been able to improve students' understanding of how the Career Services Office could help them. "By the time I returned, a new director had already made some changes," she said. "In the past six years, my staff and I have worked very hard to become a full-service office that caters to all of our students' and alumni's career development interests and needs. Two of our priorities are offering excellent customer service and providing students and alumni with the best tools, information, and resources. The administration has encouraged us to improve our outreach, not only to our students but to employers, both nationally and locally. Our efforts seem to be paying off.

"The biggest challenge is serving our evening students. Any law school with an evening division program will tell you that these students are not only the hardest to reach, but also the most difficult to engage. Most of them have day jobs and many have families.

If you think about it, their entire waking day is occupied with work, family, and schooling. As a result, we do whatever we can to accommodate those students and I'm proud of the fact that they have responded so positively to our efforts.

"We have three full-time professionals in the Career Services Office and almost 1,000 students to serve at any given time. The majority of our evening students only come to campus after regular business hours, so we have had to innovate. To make sure we catch evening students early on, we hold their mandatory first-year Career Services orientations right before evening classes begin.

"I also come in four days a week at 7 a.m. and offer early morning counseling appointments for students interested in meeting with me before they go to work. Many of them have taken me up on this and are appreciative of our accommodating them so early in the day. We also offer extended evening hours for appointments, as well as telephone appointments for students who find it hard to leave work during the day or come in at other times. Moreover, students can e-mail or fax their resumes and cover letters to us for evaluation and comment. We've even offered programming as late as 10 p.m. at night. The evening students seem to be responding quite positively to our efforts, but it continues to be an uphill struggle to connect with them because they are always so busy.

"In short, we strive to provide a Career Services Office that accommodates everyone, not just the most marketable students, and provides the most comprehensive counsel-



ing, tools, and resources to its constituents. We emphasize that every student can get the job that he or she wants by taking responsibility for the job search and working hard to achieve their personal career goals. We point out that the first step is to take advantage of our services and resources. I do believe that, thanks to all of our communication and programming, the message is getting through. Just the other day, I had an initial counseling appointment with a student who is entering her third year in the evening division. She was so pleased with the meeting that she e-mailed a whole listserv of evening students with whom she corresponds regularly to tell them how helpful our meeting had been for her. Within 24 hours, seven of her evening student peers contacted the CSO for appointments and the calls are continuing to come.

"I still wish that we could catch more evening students earlier in the process. Evening students often do not realize that they have to start to transition incrementally from a focus on their day-time jobs to positioning themselves for entry into the legal profession. This means development, albeit slow and subtle, of their legal experience and their resumes during law school, as well as networking. Too many evening students wait until they are about to graduate to start this process, and they find themselves 'behind the eight-ball,' so to speak. If this article attracts the attention of part-time students -- wherever they go to school or whatever their life situation -- and alerts them to the dangers of procrastination and motivates them to go to their Career Services Office, then I'll be happy."