



## Going Solo

[Rebecca Luczycki]

Help available for graduates going into private law practice.

A growing number of people fresh out of law school are considering another option to the traditional law firm, non-profit, government, or corporation legal job choices -- solo practice. And law-school based support programs are making that choice easier to make these days.

The Law School Consortium Project was created in 1997 to help law schools support alumni who decide to go it alone. The idea is to use grant money to provide mentoring and networking, client referral services and training and assistance with office and business management, to graduates fresh out of school or a few years into their careers, who want to hang out a shingle and work with moderate income clients.

Today, 10 law schools have these programs to support graduates in solo practice doing that kind of "low bono" work. Another 20 schools are making plans to establish similar services in the near future.

"It's difficult for a lot of people who want to do something that offers a combination of community service and entrepreneurial private experience as well," said Lovely Dhilon, executive director of the Consortium. "This offers them a chance to see something else other than firm work or pro bono with an agency. They can see that they can create something for themselves, that there are other options and there are ways that you will be supported."

Fred Rooney runs the Community Legal Resource center, the Consortium project at

City University of New York School of Law at Queens College in Flushing, N.Y. - the first such project established. He said he doesn't generally encourage brand new law graduates to take advantage of the workshop and networking services offered by his program. Rather, he hopes they will gain some hands-on experience before making the leap to solo practice. However, he said today the option is appealing to many new graduates.

Due to a lot of factors beyond our control, including the economy and personalities of graduates, some people are choosing to [go solo at graduation]," he said. "If that's the case, we will be there to support our graduates."

That support has included providing project members with free legal office management software and training in how to use it, giving them donated hand held personal organizers, and holding monthly seminars on topics of interest to people going it alone. Elaine Cates, a 2002 graduate of CUNY, joined the CUNY group and took the classes in how to run a small legal business.

"There is a database of graduates online where you can post a question and responses back," she said. "I have gone in and looked at the interaction and it seems very helpful, and very hopeful for us."

Peter Holland graduated from the University of Maryland School of Law in Baltimore 10 years ago, joined that school's Consortium group, Civil Justice, and started his own practice.

"Civil Justice has helped me in so many ways," Holland said. "The people there have opened doors for me. They have lent me moral support when I was full of self-doubt. They have shared their pleadings and their war stories with me. They showed me how to better market myself. They showed me how to earn a living while fulfilling my mission of why I went to law school."

Holland is excited that the idea is gaining interest at more schools.

"Imagine what it will be like when we have an army of lawyers across the country who are in private practice, but who are committed to public interest legal work," he said. "As the students begin to see us as role models, they will continue to change their perception of what is a respectable job and they will continue to build aspirations to do something other than mergers and acquisitions or whatever the big firms are doing."

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