



Summer Associates Survey: Part 2

Making the Most of
Real-World Experience

September 2023

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Background

Law360 Pulse surveyed law students earlier this year about their preferences for summer associateship programs. Now, we're checking back in to see how those programs went. We asked students about whether they were able to hone their legal skills at the summer associate programs they attended, getting real-world assignments and shadowing firm lawyers. Also, we found out just how creative law firms got with social events.

Methodology

Law360 Pulse conducted the second part of the Summer Associates Survey from June 14 to July 17, 2023. We received 815 responses from law students. Participants were required to identify the organizations where they were completing their summer associate programs. The survey was anonymous and will not connect any individual response with any person. Respondents were given the option to volunteer their information for interviews.

Introduction

By Craig Savitzky and Pamela Wilkinson

Law360 Pulse

The summer experience is always two-sided. Would-be lawyers are getting their first taste of work outside of the comfy confines of lecture halls, hoping to land an offer of future employment and trying to gauge the practice area where they fit best. Firms, meanwhile, are looking to present the more glamorous side of a white collar career at a white shoe establishment — giving students a taste of paintball excursions and big money bonuses before they transition to a more pressurized environment replete with long hours, billable hour quotas and the demands of client retention.

This year's summer associates are brimming with confidence. An overwhelming majority of respondents — 96% — felt their summer experience gave them enough insight into the area of law they would like to practice. Some have already decided they know enough to want to opt out: 13% of participants said their law firm experience made them want to consider pivoting to a government position, in-house counsel, solo practitioner or other.

Stress levels also appear to be in check, while a fear of there being not enough offers to go around isn't producing the cutthroat environment one might expect. Only 16% felt compelled to come early and stay late in order to

be competitive with their class cohort, and about a quarter — 22% — felt pressure to socialize with their colleagues after hours. Firms too are changing their calculus. While fun escapades are still on the table, there seems to be a more concerted effort to mold well-rounded lawyers in the image of the hiring firm. Compared to last year's survey, results show a rise in pro bono opportunities, a higher instance of assignments to multiple mentors and a widening of education in legal software. Associates were taught a range of skills in e-filing, document management and drafting, and firms' software. Valuable lessons extended beyond tools to the more conceptual, with one student identifying "the ability to clearly articulate what law is well-settled vs. gray areas" as one successful element of the experience. The student added, "my ability to research was strengthened, and creative problem-solving was tested daily."

For all that, hiring assurances are down slightly, and almost a third — 30% — of summers who had offers extended to them were not given a time frame. Disruptive technology such as generative AI is also lurking on the horizon, leaving prospective graduates unsure of what is coming next. Just under a third — 32% — are "at least somewhat concerned about the prospect of AI rendering certain law jobs obsolete in the not too distant future."

1. Programs That Excelled

The vast majority of summers felt firms had performed well, with more than 80% responding affirmatively to four questions about their associateship experience. The 30 firms on our list were at the vanguard in the critical areas the questions sought to cover: confidence-building, networking and mentorship, compensation, and fun programming.

To make the list, firms had to meet a minimum

threshold of five participants. Firm scores were derived from four satisfaction questions with a 1–5 rating scale, with 1 representing the most satisfied and 5 the least.* The scores were averaged, with a lower numerical score representing better satisfaction in each instance.

*Please note, for any year-over-year comparisons, that our 1-5 rating scale has been inverted from previous years when 5 was equivalent to most satisfied and 1 meant least satisfied.

RANK	FIRM	PARTICIPANTS	FUN	MENTORSHIP	CONFIDENT TO START CAREER	COMPENSATION FAIRNESS	OVERALL SCORE
1	Weil	10	1.1	1	1.2	1	1.08
2	Pillsbury	13	1.15	1.08	1.08	1	1.08
3	Morgan Lewis	10	1.2	1	1.2	1	1.1
4	Fish & Richardson	5	1.2	1	1.4	1	1.15
5	WilmerHale	5	1.4	1	1.4	1.2	1.25
5	Norton Rose Fulbright	6	1.17	1	1.33	1.5	1.25
5	Jones Day	11	1.45	1.09	1.36	1.09	1.25
5	Goodwin	10	1.5	1.1	1.4	1	1.25
5	Dechert	6	1.67	1	1.17	1.17	1.25
10	Willkie	5	1.5	1	1.2	1.4	1.28
11	Clifford Chance	5	1.6	1.2	1.2	1.2	1.3
12	Kirkland	30	1.47	1.17	1.43	1.23	1.33
13	Morrison Foerster	12	1.42	1.17	1.75	1	1.33
14	Baker Botts	10	1.7	1.1	1.6	1.1	1.38
15	Latham	17	1.71	1.24	1.41	1.18	1.38

RANK	FIRM	PARTICIPANTS	FUN	MENTORSHIP	CONFIDENT TO START CAREER	COMPENSATION FAIRNESS	OVERALL SCORE
16	Akin	7	1.57	1.29	1.43	1.29	1.39
17	Davis Polk	12	1.42	1.42	1.33	1.42	1.4
18	Bryan Cave Leighton Paisner	5	1.4	1.2	1.4	1.6	1.4
19	Haynes Boone	5	1.4	1.4	1.8	1.2	1.45
20	Arnold & Porter	5	2	1.4	1.4	1	1.45
20	Skadden	8	1.75	1.38	1.75	1.13	1.5
22	Gibson Dunn	5	1.6	1.4	2	1.2	1.55
23	Sidley	10	1.9	1.4	2	1.2	1.63
23	Simpson Thacher	6	1.67	1.33	1.67	1.83	1.63
25	Polsinelli	5	2	1.2	2	1.4	1.65
26	Covington	7	1.86	1.43	1.86	1.57	1.68
27	Cravath	5	1.8	1.6	1.2	2.2	1.7
28	Hogan Lovells	6	2.67	1.33	1.5	1.5	1.75
29	Ogletree	6	2	1.67	1.83	1.83	1.83
30	Jackson Lewis	5	2	1.6	1.8	2	1.85



2. The Nature of the Work

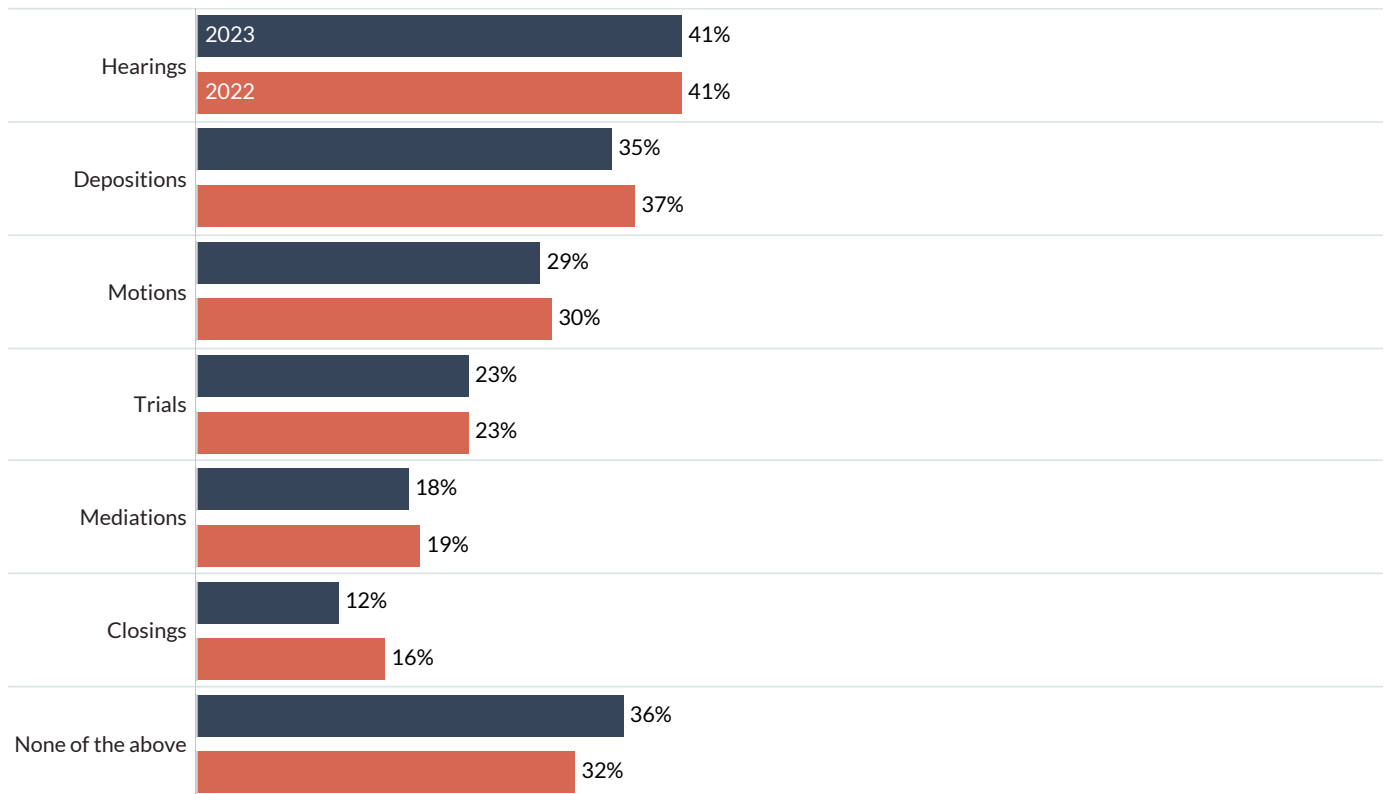
Law firms appear to be tinkering with their strategy of how to shape and harness the abilities of their incoming class. Access to pro bono work rose among associates by 5 percentage points from last year. Seventy-three percent of participants said their firm allowed them to get involved, compared to 68% in 2022.

Conversely, we are seeing a decline in opportunities to accompany attorneys to court appearances. The number of associates who received no courtroom experience by accom-

panying firm attorneys increased from 32% to 36%. Perhaps this speaks to more of an emphasis being placed on enhancing research and writing skills with the idea there will be due time to hone the external facets of the job.

Whatever adjustments firms are making have been working, with students displaying abundant confidence in summer programs. An overwhelming majority — 96% of respondents — felt their summer experience gave them insight toward which type of law they would like to practice.

I was able to gain courtroom experience by accompanying firm attorneys to the following:



The firm allowed me to get involved in pro bono work.

2023



2022



My experience gave me better insight into the kind of law I want to practice.



3. On-the-Job Training

We are seeing a further departure from the way firms have operated in recent years with an increase in mentorship assignments. The number of students who reported not being assigned to work directly with anyone at the firm saw a 5 percentage-point dip from last year — from 15% to 10% — whereas the number of students assigned multiple mentors, some permutation of associates and partners, jumped by 6 percentage points from a year ago, from 61% to 67%.

The rise in opportunities to work with mentors goes hand in hand with senior attorneys making the extra effort to be available to their younger counterparts. Partners are making themselves accessible: A whopping 92% of

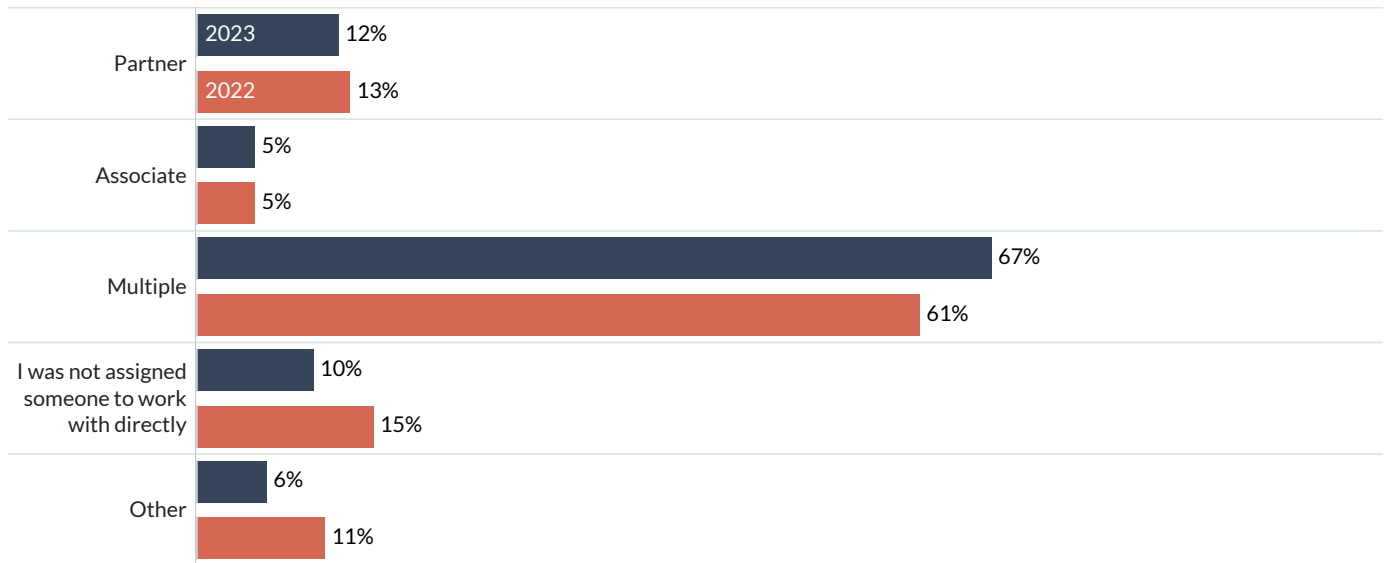
associates said they were able to establish connections with senior attorneys at the firm.

Firms appear to be doubling down on software exposure, hoping to ready their prospective attorneys for tackling what the future brings. Among some of the newer offerings presented in the survey, the breakdown was about even between three groups of tools: 31% said the firm offered training in tools to manage discovery documents and transcripts or help map out and present a case in court; 31% were offered training in tools to manage litigation docketing and calendaring; and 37% learned e-billing.

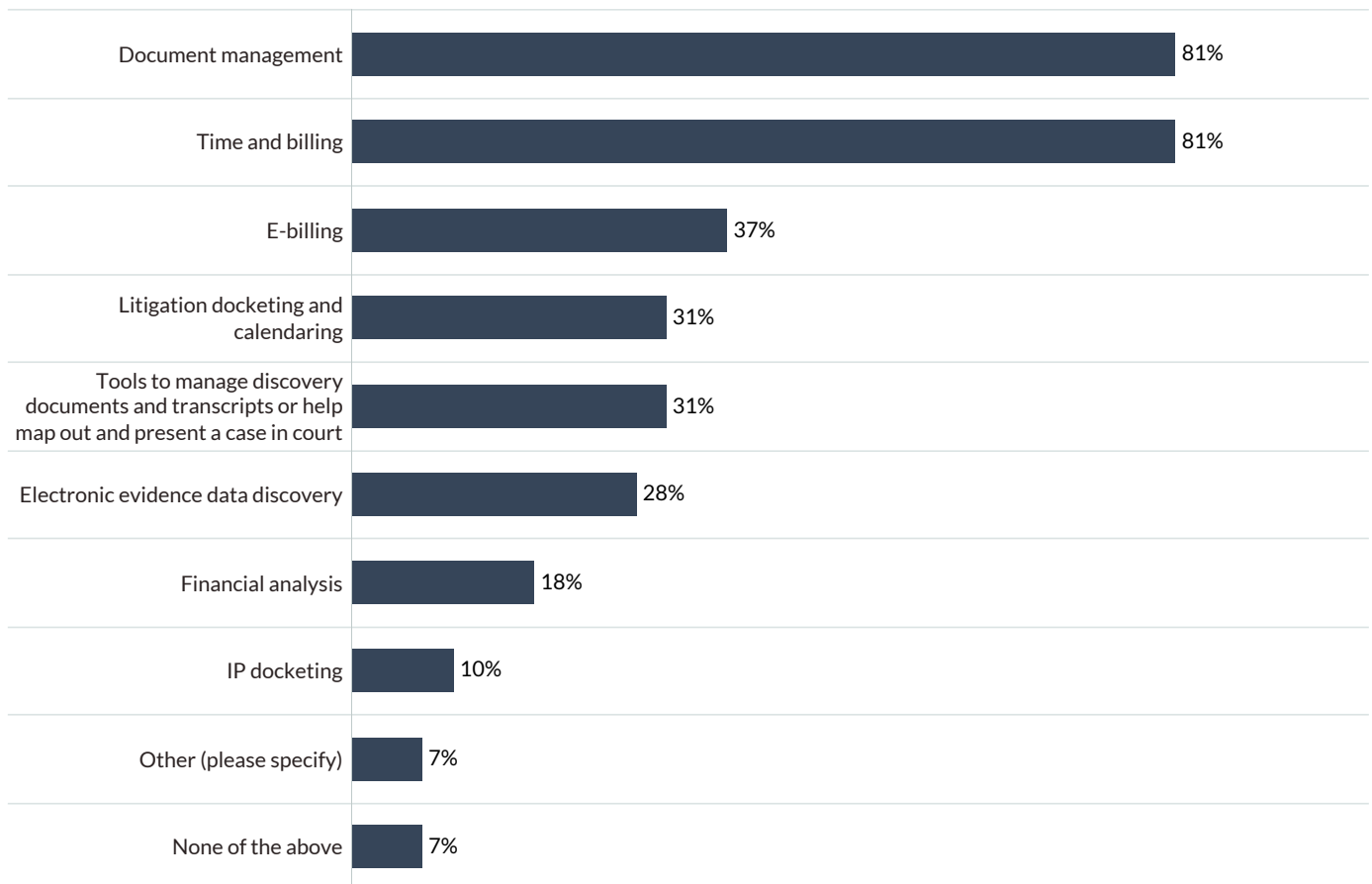
I felt I was able to make connections with senior attorneys at the firm.



I was assigned to work directly with



I was assigned to work directly with



4. Mingling With the Incoming Class

More than three-quarters of survey respondents – 76% – had their associateships take place entirely in person. That’s up 10 percentage points from a year ago and up 49 percentage points from the waning days of the pandemic. Competition, however fierce in

other areas, didn’t lend itself to a race to work the most hours. Only 16% felt compelled to come early and stay late in order to be competitive with their class cohort. Almost a quarter – 22% – felt pressure to socialize with their colleagues after hours.

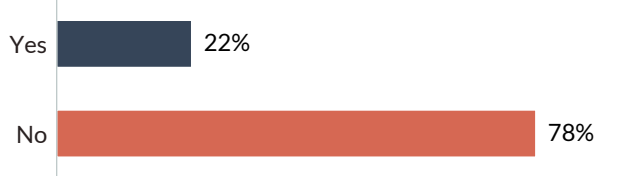
My summer associateship was conducted



Did you feel compelled to come early and stay late to be competitive with your class cohort?



I felt pressure to socialize with colleagues after hours.



5. A Look Into the Crystal Ball

The percentage of summers who received a signing bonus rose by 3 percentage points, from 7% last year to 10% this year.

More than half of respondents – 53% – erred on the side of ambition, describing their professional outlook as one that includes wanting to make partner, coveting BigLaw salaries or wanting to hit it big while young before implementing an exit strategy.

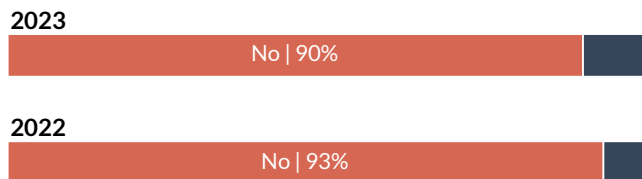
A much smaller portion – 10% – want to contribute to social justice or effect positive change, and 6% want nothing to do with BigLaw.

Hiring assurances were down 4 percentage points from last year, from 49% to 45% of participants. Within that group of students, 30% were not given a time frame for a start date.

Thirteen percent of participants said their law firm experience made them want to consider pivoting to a government position, in-house counsel, solo practitioner or other.

Just under a third – 32% – are at least somewhat concerned about the prospect of AI rendering certain law jobs obsolete in the not too distant future.

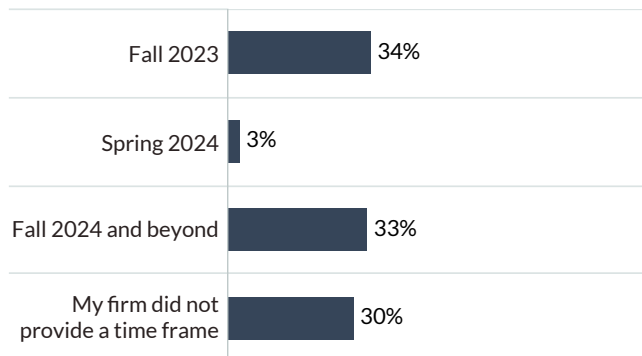
My firm offered me a signing bonus.



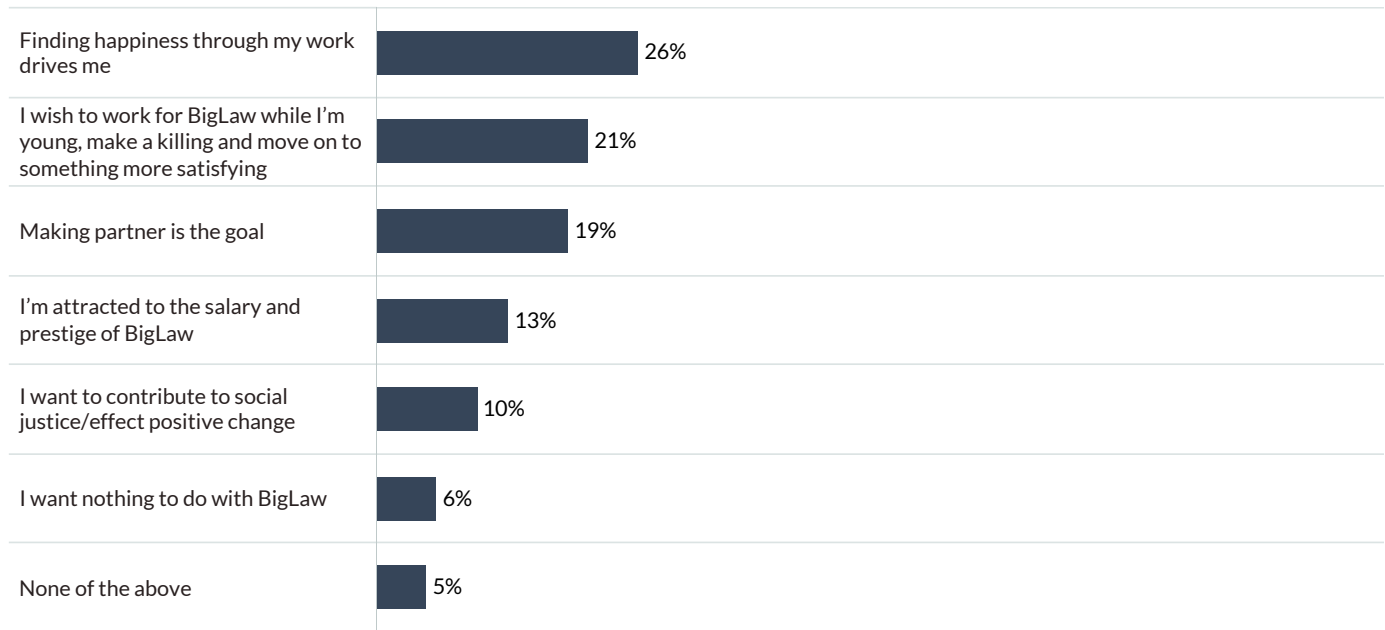
My firm assured me it would hire me.



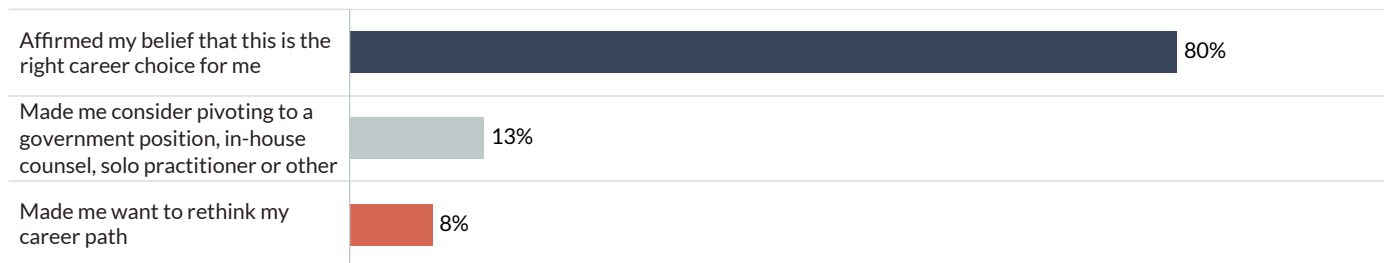
What time frame did they provide for that hiring?



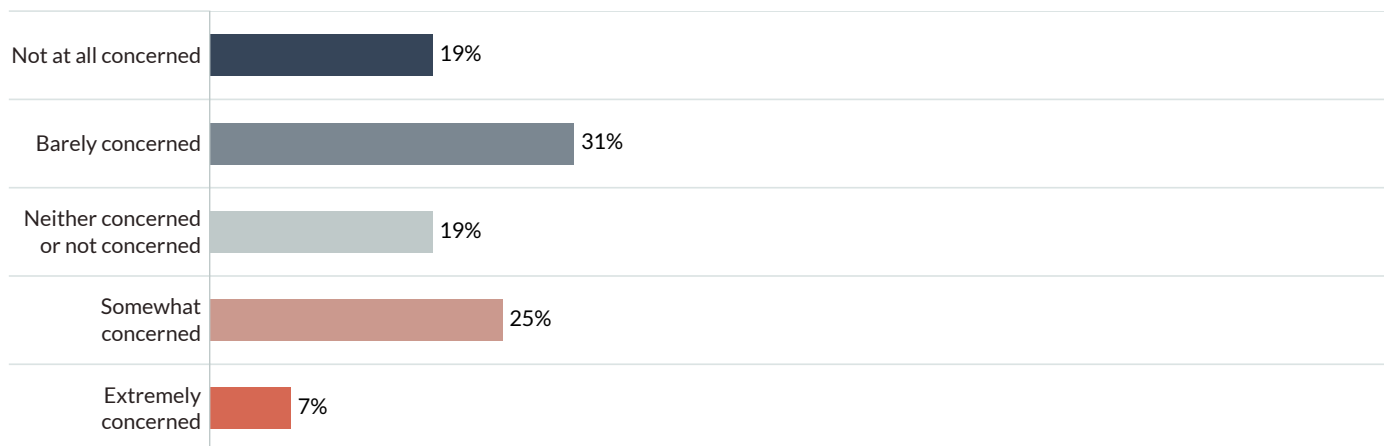
This statement best describes my outlook:



My summer experience:



As someone just starting out in their career, how concerned are you with the prospect of AI rendering certain law jobs obsolete in the not too distant future?





6. Events Not to Be Outdone

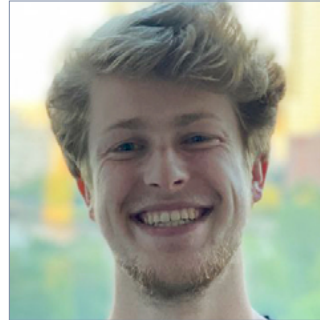
If there's any sense of one-upmanship to be found in summer programming, it may well lie in the lengths firms took to show their summer associates a good time. The world was their oyster — at least according to the most fun activities mentioned by two of the survey's participants. One firm flew its summers to Hong Kong for “the firm's annual summer hike.” Another sent its associates to Amsterdam on an international business trip.

For the firms that kept their fun stateside, there was plenty of high-end entertainment. Students enjoyed “Hamilton” on Broadway, Taylor Swift in concert, and meeting U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland. Other memorable takeaways from this year's summer experience included games of giant Jenga, wine tastings, making sushi, boat trips on the Potomac and Lake Michigan, and a tour of Chicago's breweries and distilleries in a barrel-shaped bus.

Meet the Team



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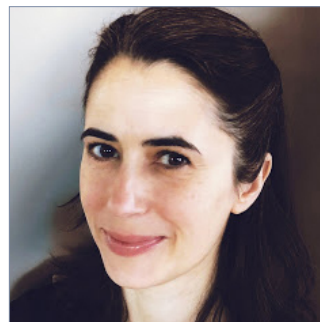
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Director of Series,
Surveys & Data

Questionnaire

What firm do you work for?

What law school do you go to?

My assigned work during my summer associateship made good use of the skills I learned in school.

- Yes
- No

I received clear instructions on my assignments.

- Yes
- No

The criteria on which my performance would be judged were made clear from the start. Select one.

- Yes
- No

The most valuable lesson I learned during my summer associateship was:

The firm allowed me to get involved in pro bono work.

- Yes
- No

My summer associate experience has left me confident I am fully prepared to embark on my career at a law firm.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

I was assigned to work directly with

- A partner
- An associate
- Multiple
- I was not assigned someone to work with directly
- Other (please specify)

I felt I was able to make connections with senior attorneys at the firm.

- Yes
- No

Here's what I would have liked my firm to do differently during my summer program:

The firm offered me training in software in the following areas:

Select all that apply.

- Document management
- Time and billing
- E-billing
- Financial analysis
- Electronic evidence data discovery
- Tools to manage discovery documents and transcripts or help map out and present a case in court
- Litigation docketing and calendaring
- IP docketing
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

The firm provided ample opportunities for networking and mentorship.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

My summer associateship was conducted

- Entirely in person
- Partially in person
- Remotely

Did you feel compelled to come early and stay late to be competitive with your class cohort?

- Yes
- No

My summer program is

- Less than 9 weeks
- 9 weeks
- 10 weeks
- 11 weeks
- More than 11 weeks

My firm offered me a signing bonus.

- Yes
- No

I was able to gain courtroom experience by accompanying firm attorneys to the following:

Select all that apply.

- Depositions
- Hearings
- Motions
- Trials
- Mediations
- Closings
- None of the above

I was given the opportunity to network with others outside my supervisors and summer associate cohort.

- Yes
- No

The most fun experience of my summer associate program was:

Please describe how the firm culture matched or differed from what was portrayed during the hiring process.

I felt pressure to socialize with colleagues after hours.

- Yes
- No

Please give the firm a rating in terms of fun programming

(1 = Super fun, 5 = Not fun at all)

My experience gave me better insight into the kind of law I want to practice.

- Yes
- No

This statement best describes my outlook:

- Making partner is the goal.
- I wish to work for BigLaw while I'm young, make a killing and move on to something more satisfying.
- Finding happiness through my work drives me.
- I want to contribute to social justice/effect positive change.
- I'm attracted to the salary and prestige of BigLaw.
- I want nothing to do with BigLaw.
- None of the above

My firm assured me it would hire me.

- Yes
- No

What time frame did they provide for that hiring?

- Fall 2023
- Spring 2024
- Fall 2024 and beyond
- My firm did not provide a time frame

My summer experience:

- Affirmed my belief that this is the right career choice for me
- Made me want to rethink my career path
- Made me consider pivoting to a government position, in-house counsel, solo practitioner or other

Relative to law school debt and what I know of market conditions and competing firms, my summer compensation is:

- Very fair
- Fair
- Neither fair nor unfair
- Unfair
- Very unfair

As someone just starting out in their career, how concerned are you with the prospect of AI rendering certain law jobs obsolete in the not too distant future?

- Extremely concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Neither concerned or not concerned
- Barely concerned
- Not at all concerned

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