

Open Letter to Law Students

As employer members of NALP, we have developed this letter to give students additional insight into employers' perspectives on the recruiting process. We think the following suggestions will help you interview more efficiently within the broad provisions of the NALP *Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruitment Activities*, and particularly the "General Standards for Timing of Offers and Decisions."

The recruiting season is a busy time for everyone involved — students, career services offices, and employers. Many students who are trying to balance academics and interviewing may not be aware that employers face similar challenges in trying to give all applicants careful consideration. For instance, for each callback visit, an employer schedules a round of interviews with its lawyers, considering factors such as areas of practice, educational background, and personal interests, so that the applicant and the employer have ample opportunity to learn about each other. When you take into account that each employer, depending on its size, may schedule from two to twenty or more interviews per day for a period of approximately six to ten weeks, you will realize that interviewing takes up a significant amount of attorneys' time and generates a huge volume of paperwork, email, and telephone calls.

Given this situation there are certain guidelines that employers would like applicants to follow so that the process runs as smoothly as possible, to the benefit of both students and employers.

■ *Focusing Your Search*

Prior to beginning your job search, we recommend you bring your search into focus. Take a few moments to reflect on your present goals in terms of working environment, areas of practice, geographic preferences, and concerns about personal and professional quality of life. Employer web sites and materials on file in your career services office provide extensive, reliable information about many employers that may be of interest to you. Review this information carefully. You should also feel free to question employers about information that is not provided. The comments of fellow students who have clerked at employers in which you are interested can give you insight into the intangibles of the office's culture. Speak with your career services office about their knowledge of particular employers. You should now have a basis for making informed comparisons among types of employers, comparisons which will prove invaluable as your search progresses.

As you prepare to interview, take advantage of your career services office for mock interviews and assistance with résumé and cover letter writing. It is helpful to keep your career services office up to date on your job search.

■ *On- and Off-Campus Interviewing*

A few suggestions:

1. Only request interviews with employers in which you have a genuine interest.
2. Take a broad approach to your choice of employers. If you question whether your experience or credentials are a good fit with a particular employer, consult with your career services office before requesting an interview with that employer.
3. Visit the employer's web site and review the employer's materials on file in your school's career services office and in the *NALP Directory of Legal Employers* (www.nalpdirectory.com).
4. Prepare in advance so that you will be able to ask thoughtful questions during your interview.
5. Be prepared to discuss your résumé in detail. Be certain that your résumé indicates a current address, telephone number, and email address, and that you advise the employer of any changes at the time of the interview. Be prepared to answer questions regarding what's not on your résumé. Proofread your application materials, including your writing sample, for grammatical errors or typos.
6. Have readily available copies of your current transcript and a brief (7-10 pages) writing sample and be prepared to discuss them as well.

■ *Callback Interviews*

If you participate in on-campus interviews (or arrange initial interviews on your own) and begin receiving callback invitations, it is time to focus your search further. We recommend that you apply the previously discussed focusing techniques to the information you have gathered from your initial interviews. You should then be able to make educated decisions about which callback invitations to accept.

When you receive a callback invitation, you have two options: email or call to schedule an interview or decline the invitation. If you are no longer interested in a particular employer or city, do not be concerned that your decision will be taken personally. Most employers have a limited number of invitations to extend; you are helping your fellow students by telling each employer as soon as possible that you will not be accepting its invitation.

Please keep the following in mind as you plan your fall interview strategy:

1. Respond promptly, preferably within two business days, to callback invitations.
2. Schedule callback interviews only with employers that you are seriously considering.
3. Avoid rescheduling interviews unless absolutely necessary.
4. If you find it necessary to cancel or reschedule a callback interview, please do so as far in advance as possible as

there will likely be penalty fees and/or nonrefundable airfares for which the employer will be obligated to pay. If working with a travel agency, be sure to cancel or reschedule your travel arrangements **directly** with that agency in addition to letting the employer know. It is usually better to cancel a callback if you know you would not accept an offer from that employer. Employers will not be insulted; rather you will be saving them and yourself unnecessary time and effort. Of course, only cancel if you are sure you would not accept an offer, and don't forget to check the firm's travel policy to confirm you will not incur non-refundable travel expenses.

5. When you call, ask for the names of the attorneys you will be meeting with and how much time to allot for your interview visit. Go to the employer's web site and review the bios of the attorneys with whom you will be meeting. Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early for your interview, but if you arrive at the office more than 20 minutes early, consider looking for a coffee shop in the area and waiting there. Usually the recruiting staff is juggling many interviewees at once, and arriving too early can be disruptive.
6. Bring copies of your transcript and a writing sample. (**Please note:** these requests vary from employer to employer.) If your writing sample is part of a work assignment from a previous employer, you should ask permission of that employer to distribute the document, and you should delete all identifying references to the client or the parties involved.
7. Make sure that you can be reached by telephone and email. You should give careful consideration to any voice mail message you record to be certain it is clear, concise, and professional. You should also provide your email address on your résumé.
8. Following a callback interview with an employer, if you do not wish to be considered for an offer, please inform the employer promptly that you wish to withdraw from consideration.

■ **Additional Callback Tips**

1. Find out from your career services office if there are any 3Ls from your school who summered at the firm. If so, reach out to your fellow students to pick their brains before the interview. This may provide some inside tips on your interviewers and on the firm's major practice areas that will help you demonstrate to the employer that you did your homework!
2. Make sure you know what practice areas are "big" in the office for which you are interviewing. Employers may advertise many practice areas on their web site, but only some of them may exist in the office for which you are interviewing. It's fine to express an interest in a niche practice, but make sure to convey the extent to which you are flexible and willing to try other practice areas as well.
3. Remember to turn your cell phone off before your interview.

■ **Reimbursable Expenses**

After an initial on-campus interview — or an initial in-office interview you have arranged on your own — some employers will reimburse you for expenses you incur for a

callback interview, such as transportation, hotel accommodations, and meals. Discuss expense reimbursement policies and procedures **before you travel** to meet with the employers. Each employer has its own guidelines and limits with respect to travel reimbursement, and these policies may vary depending upon whether the interview resulted from an on-campus encounter or a write-in application. Students are responsible for finding out these policies before they travel, and employers are responsible for making these policies widely and easily available to students. Naturally, employers prefer that you take steps to save money when possible: visiting several employers in one trip and purchasing the lowest cost coach fare airplane tickets are recommended. An important note: many employers in a given city/region are willing to share expenses with the other employers you may be visiting in one trip. If you are visiting more than one employer during a single trip, inquire about their willingness to share expenses with the other employers (almost all will appreciate the opportunity to reduce their reimbursement costs through sharing). Many times, one of the employers you visit will serve as your "host" in the city/region, meaning that you will submit all of your expenses to them and they will contact the other employers about sharing the expenses. You will find sample reimbursement forms in the materials provided by many employers for on-campus interviews or on the employer's web site. If you don't find current forms, be sure to get them from the employer **before you travel**. Many employers state their reimbursement guidelines or limits on their forms, and many have also placed copies of their guidelines on file in the career services offices.

■ **Offers**

When you receive an offer, be aware that employers must consider numbers seriously in the employment process. They extend only a certain number of offers because they know from past experience that "x" percent (this percentage differs from employer to employer) are accepted. If you receive an offer and have no intention of accepting it, please decline as quickly as possible, preferably by telephone or email. Following up with a confirming letter is encouraged. If you wait to decline, you may be preventing the employer from making an offer to another student. You should be familiar with the NALP *Principles and Standards for Law Placement and Recruitment Activities*, Part V, "General Standards for the Timing of Offers and Decisions" (which are available online at www.nalp.org under "Principles & Standards" and in your career services office). As outlined in Part I, "General Principles," students and employers are encouraged to keep the lines of communication open. "If unusual circumstances or particular organizational constraints require a law school, a candidate, or an employer to modify any provision herein, every effort should be made to find an alternative acceptable to all parties concerned."

Do not be defensive if an employer asks where you will be working when you reject an offer. Employers often keep statistics about where students work. They may also be interested in the reasons for your decision and would appreciate candor.

We hope these suggestions will be useful. We wish you well in the upcoming hiring season.