

EXPERTS WEIGH IN ON CURRENT JOB MARKET TRENDS

December 11, 2020

Given the change of course that has happened in the world, we wanted to provide expert opinions on what aspiring graduates can do to start off their careers in an uncertain economic climate. We wanted to know what skills will be more important, where the economy is doing relatively well, and if there will be any lasting effects on the job market.

Companies are looking for candidates that can handle the new responsibilities of the job market. Recent graduates actually have an advantage because they are comfortable using newer technologies and have been communicating virtually their whole lives. They can take what they've learned and apply it immediately.

We spoke to professors and experts from several universities and companies to get their opinions on where the job market for recent graduates is heading, as well as how young graduates entering the industry can be adequately prepared. Here are their thoughts.

Our Panel of Experts



Adam Chodorow
Arizona State University



Christina Bohannon
University of Iowa



Ronald Rychlak
University of Mississippi



Michele DeStefano
University of Miami and Affiliated
Faculty, Harvard Law School
Executive Education



Dr. Jay Zagorsky
Boston University



Rana Boujaoude
Golden Gate University



Maria Comas
Duquesne University



Megan Carpenter
University of New Hampshire



Francesca Laguardia Ph.D.
Montclair State University



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Pepperdine University

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Quinnipiac University



Brendan Holt
Holt Law

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ADAM CHODOROW

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Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Adam Chodorow: When the pandemic first hit, just about everything ground to a halt. However, after an initial adjustment, legal work came roaring back. The pandemic does not appear to have affected our students' job prospects because there is plenty of work to be done. ASU Law rallied around its students to create paid employment opportunities when their summer jobs were canceled or postponed due to the pandemic. The students gained a meaningful, practical experience, in addition to much-needed financial support.

And now we face a more interesting question and one we won't know the answer to for many years: Where and how our graduates will be working. The pandemic has proven that lawyers can work from home for long periods. It is too soon to tell whether this will be a temporary aberration or the new normal. Firms may relinquish or significantly reduce their office space to save money and time, but doing so could also affect firm culture, the ability to train young lawyers, and a host of other important factors we have yet to consider.

For years, futurists have told us that big changes were coming to the way lawyers practiced, whether because of flexible work arrangements, increased use of technology, or globalization. The pandemic forced us all to go down that path sooner than many expected. The jury is still out on what of this new way to work we will keep and what of the old we will discard.

What type of skills will young graduates need when they enter the workforce in the coming years?

Adam Chodorow: Most students come to law school, thinking that they are there to learn the law. However, being an effective lawyer requires far more than simply knowing the rules. Lawyers need to be creative problem solvers who can understand their clients' needs and advise them on minimizing risk best while achieving their goals. Perhaps the most important skill lawyers need is the ability to communicate clearly, whether in writing or orally. Other skills include gathering information, spot issues, and analyzing what the law prohibits, requires, or permits. This involves more specific skills, such as the ability to:

Listen to and work with clients.
Find, absorb, and understand vast amounts of information in a short time frame.
Find ways to advance client interests within the existing legal environment.

In addition to these basic lawyering skills, young lawyers will need to be technically proficient with various computer programs, databases, and other electronic resources that are fast becoming indispensable to the practice of law.

What experience really stands out on resumes?

Adam Chodorow: Law firms often say that they are looking for practice-ready attorneys - that is, attorneys who can come in and contribute on day one. The fact is - no matter how much experience law students get, there will always be a steep learning curve once they graduate. With that said, externships and summer positions in the field the students want to practice in will help students along that curve and signal to employers that they truly are interested in the type of work an employer does. Thus, those interested in criminal law should try to get externships and summer positions as prosecutors or with the public defenders' office or defense firms; those interested in family law might try to get an externship with a judge working on family law.



CHRISTINA BOHANNAN

Professor, Lauridsen Family Fellow in Law, and Director of Master of Studies in Law Program

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What type of skills will young graduates need when they enter the workforce in the coming years?

Christina Bohannan: Graduates will need to have excellent analytical and communication skills. They will need to understand how the law intersects with their clients' business or other interests. They will also need to have cultural proficiency to work with diverse clients and coworkers with different ideas, cultures, and backgrounds.

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Christina Bohannan: Legal studies allow graduates to find work anywhere in the United States. For example, although our law school is in Iowa, we send many students all over the country.

How do you envision technology impacting this field in the next 5 years?

Christina Bohannan: Technology will continue to play a role in legal practice. Over the last several years, it has allowed more people to work remotely from the firms or other organizations where they practice. The pandemic has made online meetings and court arguments more common than ever. But I believe that when the epidemic is lifted, we will likely return to mostly in-person court appearances.



RONALD RYCHLAK



Distinguished Professor of Law

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What are the best companies to work for?

Ronald Rychlak: Legal support is needed in numerous areas, from small law firms to large multinational corporations. More and more, you see colleges and universities with a need in this field. The goal should be to find a welcoming office, a stable environment, and a geographic location that fits your needs and desires. Fortunately, with this background, there are many options to choose from.

Will there be an increase or decrease in demand for graduates in this field in the next 5 years?

Ronald Rychlak: Regardless of the business climate, legal issues will remain. Moreover, in the legal profession, more and more is turning to legal support services to meet clients' needs. I expect the demand for graduates in the field only to grow.

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Ronald Rychlak: Opportunities in this field exist almost everywhere. There is a particular need in rural areas, but legal support services are needed anywhere people live and do business. That's nice, because you need not limit your options due to geographic restrictions.



MICHELE DESTEFANO

Professor of Law

University of Miami and Affiliated Faculty,

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What type of skills will young graduates need when they enter the workforce in the coming years?

Michele DeStefano: The top four skills that students need when they enter the workforce in the coming years are 1) creativity 2) business acumen 3) change inspiration (the ability to inspire and lead change efforts which include a whole host of skills like communication, marketing, persuasion, open-mindedness, etc.); and 4) digital transformation skills (understanding what is digital transformation and how to help enable it).

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Michele DeStefano: I think a ripe place for graduates to learn these four skills is with the companies that are now often called "new" or "alternative" law companies (which is a misnomer undoubtedly). These companies, called initially legal process organizations, have gotten a bad rap, yet (client by client) they are transforming what we think of as legal services. They provide holistic legal services that are client-centric and the big picture and include the law's business side. These new law companies like Elevate Services and UnitedLex are making considerable strides in our marketplace. And they are an excellent place for young graduates to work to hone the skills that (unfortunately) law schools aren't joining and that is essential to success.

How do you envision technology impacting this field in the next 5 years?

Michele DeStefano: I recently helped create a new non-profit called the Digital Legal Exchange (in collaboration with Mark Cohen, Bill Deckelman, Dan Reed, and Reen SenGupta). As its name indicates, it is all about going digital-helping in-house legal departments accelerate their digital transformation. But unlike it sounds, digital transformation is not only about tech. True, tech is part of digital transformation. And as research by the Leading Edge Forum shows, tech modernization is the first step towards digital transformation. But tech is not the hardest or the most significant part of digital transformation. Instead, the hardest and biggest parts are people, culture, mindset, and purpose.

So, ironically, I do not think that technology will change the way we work as rapidly as people think it is going to - at least not the fancy technology that everyone is talking about, like AI. Although, I believe that AI and blockchain's potential to move us forward and enable lawyers to predict better what clients need and add value that creates revenue is outstanding, I don't believe that we'll see the true potential come to fruition within the next five years. Yes, we will see it in bits and pieces, and some places/companies/industries, but it won't be as fast and as disruptive as everyone seems to think it will be.

That said, I believe that the legal professionals who understand what it means to transform digitally, how to track and analyze data and metrics, how to change culture and mindset, and who understand how the technology works, and, therefore, how it can be leveraged, are the professionals who will succeed. They will be the ones who provide a more client-centric experience and who help generate revenue for and with their internal and external clients.



DR. JAY ZAGORSKY

Senior Lecturer, Markets, Public Policy and Law
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Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Dr. Jay Zagorsky: College graduates looking for jobs care about two things: jobs and pay. Once the coronavirus is over, I believe both will return to pre-pandemic levels. The pandemic has hurt many companies. For example, restaurants, bars, and hotels have all gone out of business, destroying jobs and pay in the hospitality and travel industries. However, there is incredible pent-up demand. Many people have not traveled or eaten outside their home since the virus started spreading. When the pandemic is over, people will want to spend money to reclaim missed experiences.

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Dr. Jay Zagorsky: College graduates looking for work typically don't know about a government source called the "Occupational Outlook Handbook." (<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/home.htm>).

College majors don't line up exactly with jobs. Instead, most majors qualify you for a variety of positions. The "Occupational Outlook Handbook" shows you which positions over the next decade will be in high and which positions in low demand. You can tailor your resume to fit a variety of positions.

I teach statistics to business school students and like showing them that statisticians are currently the fifth fastest-growing occupation in the U.S. I tell them they don't have to major in statistics to apply for these jobs. Instead, they should highlight the one course they took with me. I also like pointing out that the handbook shows one of the shrinking areas of work is chief executive of a corporation. US businesses have been steadily consolidating, making it tougher than ever to get to the corner office for those who aim high.

How do you envision technology impacting this field in the next 5 years?

Dr. Jay Zagorsky: Technology has been rapidly transforming society. Smartphones are now ubiquitous. However, they have not been around for a very long time. The first iPhone came out in 2008. New technologies, like the smartphone, which will revolutionize our society, will continue to appear. Since no one can predict how technology can impact any field, the best thing that college graduates can do is be flexible. Being able to learn new things quickly, being willing to start over, and being ready to volunteer are traits every business looking to hire employees wants, especially in times of rapid technological change. You don't need to be an expert in every new technology.

Instead, just be open to new ideas and experiences throughout your career and make sure your boss knows if they need a person to try new things out, you are the one.



RANA BOUJAOUDE

Associate Professor of Law Director of Bar Services
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Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Rana Boujaoude: Absolutely. Our graduates are facing enormous hurdles trying to get licensed and enter into the workforce.

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Rana Boujaoude: It's difficult to say. With the bar exam being postponed in most jurisdictions across the country, this is causing a delay for licensing. Even some of our graduates who had post-bar work lined up before the pandemic are finding their positions are no longer needed.

How do you envision technology impacting this field in the next 5 years?

Rana Boujaoude: I think that the shift to virtual and online work will continue in all industries. Especially in the legal field, I envision court hearings and other procedures to remain the norm for years to come.



MARIA COMAS

Director of Career Services
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Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Maria Comas: It's difficult to know how much of an impact the pandemic will have on graduates. Many May 2020 graduates have been impacted in the short-term because bar exams across the country have been rescheduled, in some instances, more than once. This means that these graduates will start their legal careers later than they normally would have if the bar exam would have been held in July, as it usually is.

Some large law firms announced reductions in pay, furloughs, and layoffs earlier in the year as a result of the pandemic. Some of those firms have been able to adjust those reductions and bring back employees, which are positive signs, while at the same time, other firms have announced additional layoffs. It's difficult to project the long-term impact of the pandemic, but signs point to the likelihood of faster recovery than what we saw after the 2009 economic downturn.

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Maria Comas: Lawyers assist individuals, small businesses, large corporations, and governments with a variety of questions, issues, and policies, in geographic areas, ranging from large cities to small towns. For that reason, opportunities are available to law graduates in every state. However, depending on the economy and top industries in a particular area, the types of opportunities may vary. Lawyers are always needed to serve in rural and underserved populations, in addition to more populated cities and towns.

How do you envision technology impacting this field in the next 5 years?

Maria Comas: Technology will continue to impact the legal profession in where and how work is done. We've witnessed innovation and flexibility in the legal profession's ability to work from home during the pandemic, and some legal employers will continue to consider remote work options as a way to reduce overhead costs, just as is being done in other industries.

As automation, artificial intelligence, and other technology evolve, the practice of law will change as well. This may involve additional changes to legal research, e-discovery, e-filing, legal operations, and decision making, for example.



MEGAN CARPENTER

Dean and Professor of Law
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Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Megan Carpenter: The current global pandemic makes apparent the vital role that lawyers play in civil society, particularly in times of chaos and disruption. When there is chaos, when there are vulnerable populations, lawyers are essential for the grand challenges that we face. Throughout history, whether the issue is slavery or women's rights, religious liberty, health law, and policy, how we define private rights and public needs or develop vital technologies, the big arguments have been about who we are as a people, and the society we want to live in, and lawyers are necessary to help find solutions.

This is particularly true in the area of intellectual property and technology law. As the legal framework surrounding human creativity, intellectual property is relevant across industries and provides the foundation for innovation and invention. Transactions in IP are the system of movement for innovation around the world. Solutions to problems from climate change to international peace and security are based on innovation. Issues at the intersection of data and privacy are critical in the digital age. And IP can help carve a path through the current crisis, whether working to support vaccine development on the front lines at the World Health Organization, developing online learning technologies, or helping to make public health policy. Our IP system is fraught with uncertainty, and yet, is at the center of some of the most important global challenges we face.

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Megan Carpenter: We see geographic boundaries dissolve. The pandemic has shown us that lawyers are able to use technology and work in remote locations, across the country and around the world. Rather than thinking of particularly good places to find work opportunities, I might reverse that and say that just about anywhere can be a good place to find work opportunities in the future.



FRANCESCA LAGUARDIA PH.D.

Associate Professor
Montclair State University
Department of Justice Studies

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Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Francesca Laguardia Ph.D.: Only time will tell. Many students may go straight into law school, when otherwise they would have taken a year or two to work. Others may need to work or be more hesitant about the expense of law school, given the uncertain financial situation. There is no way to judge how this reshuffling will pan out overall. And, while many businesses may be contracting, paralegals are needed for the work law firms continue to do.

Are there any particularly good places in the United States for graduates to find work opportunities in this field after they graduate?

Francesca Laguardia Ph.D.: The legal field is universal. Major firms may tend to gravitate to bigger cities, but there is legal work everywhere.

How do you envision technology impacting this field in the next 5 years?

Francesca Laguardia Ph.D.: Technology is already having a huge impact on the legal field. Huge amounts of time traditionally spent on document review is now unnecessary as technology takes over. New technological knowledge is always important for paralegals and attorneys. Now, given the increase in an online court, other legal appearances, technological comfort, and a knowledge of privacy concerns have become even more necessary.



RYAN BROWN

Student
Pepperdine University



[Website](#)

What general advice would you give to a graduate beginning their career?

Ryan Brown: Generally speaking, I'd recommend that new graduates trying to find work through their families, friends, or other personal connections. Otherwise, it will be tough to find a job right now. Of course, if recent graduates have ever thought about continuing their education, I think now is a great time to do that. I unsuccessfully looked for work for several months this summer before deciding to return to Pepperdine to get my MPP degree.

What technology do you think will become more important and prevalent in the field in the next 3-5 years?

Ryan Brown: As more universities and companies are conducting business virtually, it will be increasingly important to master a broad spectrum of videoconferencing services.

Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Ryan Brown: Yes, I believe there will be an enduring impact. In my economics courses at Pepperdine, we studied a paper that suggests severe short- and long-term implications for those who graduate from college during a recession. Here is the link: <https://www.nber.org/papers/w12159>

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WILLIAM LOGUE

Director of Dispute Resolution Training Interim Director of Summer Programs

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What general advice would you give to a graduate beginning their career?

William Logue: New graduates in dispute resolution will face a different world than just a few months ago.

If graduates want to start as an independent third-party neutral, it will be challenging to establish a reputation, and bring in business. There are many other opportunities to use and apply the skills - as specialized conflict managers, and dispute resolvers, or using those skills that will make them more useful and valued as part of another job.

Graduates should look at where their skills can be used within organizations - that may be as a mediator, in an ombuds office, in HR, or as a project facilitator. They should think of how their dispute resolution skills can supplement other substantive knowledge to help the organization move forward - especially with

more remote work and the tensions that can bring. They can also think about how they can skillfully facilitate work between workgroups and divisions, and act as conflict coaches to individuals.

What technology do you think will become more important and prevalent in the field in the next 3-5 years?

William Logue: The pandemic has and will continue to accelerate the use of technology. Six months ago, few mediations or arbitrations were held by video conference. Now, the majority have moved in that direction. Being familiar with, and skillful in using, the new technology, and the role it can play in dispute system design, will be necessary. The adoption of online dispute resolution (ODR) and integration of artificial intelligence will move faster because of the pandemic and the new demand and increased user comfort level with technology.

Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

William Logue: Although this seems like a potential displacement of people, virtual platforms require a different kind of preparation for users and more considerable attention to rapport building where relationships are meaningful. Those people skills are key strengths that an expert in dispute resolution and conflict management can bring. Right dispute resolution professionals are flexible, adaptable, and creative - a good foundation for an evolving career.



BRENDAN HOLT

Mediator, Collaborative Divorce Attorney, Parenting Coordinator and Guardian Ad Litem

Holt Law

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What general advice would you give to a graduate beginning their career?

Brendan Holt: Continue to remain curious professionally; be a life-long learner. There are many nuances, ideas, techniques, and opportunities that can only really develop if you stay engaged and open to growth. Seek out occasions to speak with folks about the communication difficulties they experience, whether professional or personal, and listen. From these experiences, you can gain a fantastic insight into both the root causes of conflict and new ways to approach facilitating the resolution of that conflict.

What technology do you think will become more important and prevalent in the field in the next 3-5 years?

Brendan Holt: Wow, technology changes so quickly, that looking out that far is ambiguous. But I think that ultimately, for this field, exciting technology will likely be systems that streamline the processing of large amounts of data and written communications, like contracts or email threads, for example, and help identify patterns and specific issues. The job of actually using empathy and deep listening to help people in conflict better understand and hear one another, and better communicate overlapping interests will probably remain a human skillset. But I

think that technology that allows dispute resolution professionals, like mediators, to discover past communication pitfalls and patterns more quickly, will let them get to the work of fostering human communication and connection more readily.

Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Brendan Holt: Absolutely, and hopefully, not all of the harmful variety. This pandemic came on suddenly and had such a drastic impact on so many aspects of our lives and typical systems that it forced us all very quickly to adapt. We've had to rethink how we communicate fundamentally; and what traditional business and professional practices could be refined or replaced. There is a real and ongoing opportunity to invent, embrace, and accelerate new, streamlined, and more effective systems. Processes that we realize we should continue to use and develop, even when things go back to "normal."



MICHELLE MILLER

Associate Professor of Legal Studies

Quinnipiac University

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What general advice would you give to a graduate beginning their career?

Michelle Miller: Be willing to be flexible - as to the area of law, as to the size of the law firm, as to new technology you may need to learn, and, if possible, as to the area of the country. You may be fortunate and find a job that meets all of your criteria, but it's better not to expect to land your "dream job" immediately upon graduation. You may know better what your "dream job" really is after getting some experience in the field.

What technology do you think will become more important and prevalent in the field in the next 3-5 years?

Michelle Miller: Of course, it has long been the case that attorneys and paralegals are not using actual books, even to do legal research, as Lexis and Westlaw have become ever more popular. However, over the past several years, smaller, less expensive, legal research products have been giving these two companies a run for their money, especially in smaller firms. No Legal Studies program can cover all of the technology that a graduate might encounter. This means that graduates must be willing to learn new research and office management programs, other than those they may have met at university.

Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Michelle Miller: This is a question I'm not sure anyone can answer! There is speculation that working from home may become generally more prevalent, now that the pandemic has shown that it can be a productive way to work. The theme

here seems to be once again - flexibility! Graduates will need to be flexible as the post-pandemic world sorts itself out. This includes being willing to work more from home, if necessary.

S**SHELLEY SADIN**

Associate Dean of Professional and Career Development
Quinnipiac University
Professional and Career Development

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What general advice would you give to a graduate beginning their career?

Shelley Sadin: Communicating clearly, both orally and in writing.

It is identifying and analyzing legal and factual issues with an open, thoughtful, and creative mind.

Working collaboratively with clients, colleagues, opponents, and others involved in a case to solve problems.

Being meticulously ethical and professional in all interactions. This includes treating everyone involved in a matter with respect; recognizing and honoring their different backgrounds and perspectives.

Being self-disciplined, motivated, resilient, courageous, kind, and flexible.

What technology do you think will become more important and prevalent in the field in the next 3-5 years?

Shelley Sadin: We cannot predict this, given how rapidly technology is advancing. We can say that remote meetings have taken over. Zoom use has increased exponentially, and distant court proceedings in Connecticut are being held via Microsoft Teams. Graduates will generally need to adapt to new technologies as they are introduced to keep up with the people and businesses they hope to represent.

Will there be an enduring impact of the coronavirus pandemic on graduates?

Shelley Sadin: We cannot predict whether the pandemic (financial disruption and other harmful effects) will endure.

But we can identify a couple of potential enduring upsides:

The pandemic has shown employers, including law firms, that lawyers can communicate and work remotely. This should open up many more remote job opportunities and increase students' job searches' geographical scope.

The pandemic makes many students stop and think about what matters to them as they pursue their career paths. We always encourage students to be reflective and creative in their career pursuits. The uncertainty and changes in working conditions wrought by the pandemic have underscored the value to students of thinking intentionally about where they want to practice. What field of law -- or law-related field -- would be most rewarding for them?

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