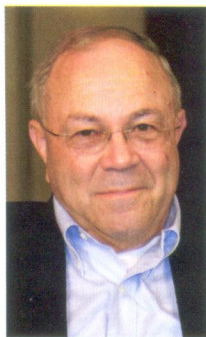


Economic Downturn Demands Enhanced Placement Efforts

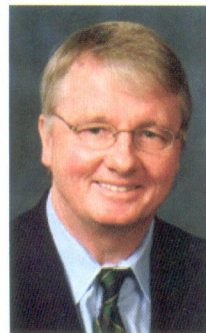
Despite the unstable economy and depressed hiring climate, 99 percent of the law school's graduating class of 2009 was placed within nine months of graduation. This incredible accomplishment would not have been possible without talented students, highly supportive alumni and faculty members and the sustained efforts of everyone in our Placement Office.

The Down Market



Terry Cole ('70)

Tallahassee attorney Terry P. Cole ('70) offers wise advice to students and recent graduates in this climate: It pays to know more than one area of law and be flexible. "The good thing about a law degree is you can do other things with it if you have to, while you are waiting for a turnaround," he said.



Andy Dogali ('86)

Another route some recent graduates around the state have taken is opening their own firms. Andy Dogali ('86), an expert in law firm management and chair of The Florida Bar's Law Office Management Assistance Service (LOMAS) Advisory Board, sees a lot of this happening. "There are people hanging shingles at a rate we've never seen before and that is a very scary thing to do," he said. "They probably should be referring to LOMAS because the 'how to start a

law firm' materials are terrific."

After visiting with alumni and firms across the region, law school Dean Don Weidner said not all sectors have been affected equally and several trends are clear. "The greatest dislocations seem to be in firms that specialize in public offerings, real estate and other transactional work," Weidner said.

According to Cole, firms specializing in bankruptcy, creditors' rights and mergers and acquisitions have picked up quite a bit of work. In fact, he said at least one large statewide firm based in southern Florida has cross-trained a number of its attorneys to handle an increase in those areas while avoiding

layoffs in areas such as real estate and commercial development.

"Many of the large firms have substantially slashed the number of summer associates and new lawyers they are hiring," Weidner said. He noted that many of the largest firms have asked new hires to defer their start dates, and for the first time in memory some have even rescinded offers.

At the other extreme, smaller firms seem more stable. Cole's firm, Oertel, Fernandez, Cole, & Bryant, P.A., is a small practice of 12 attorneys who specialize in administrative, environmental, governmental, health care and licensing law. "We have been very fortunate that we have not really been negatively impacted by the downturn," Cole said. "In the environmental area, people still have to have environmental permits for air emissions or water emissions. They still need a permit and when it gets complicated, they still call us just as they did before" the downturn.

Weidner has noted other tendencies in today's legal market. Litigation is on a firm foundation as is state government, especially given stimulus funding, and federal employment seems to be booming.

"I think litigators are going to at least be able to find places to work; transactional lawyers are continuing to have a very difficult time finding anything to do," said Dogali, who also is a shareholder and co-founder of Forizs & Dogali in Tampa. "For transactional lawyers, times are only good when the economy is good. Right now nobody is starting corporations or closing real estate contracts."

Cole added: "I see some signs of property sales starting to move here in Tallahassee," but added that some forecasts do not project revenues to return to pre-crash levels "until toward the end of this decade. So, for young lawyers, it's still a stretch."

Utilizing the Placement Office

With such gloomy economic forecasts, many young and displaced attorneys are searching for a variety of networking opportunities, employment leads or other avenues to help them land positions. The law school's Placement Office can be an excellent resource.

"The downturn in the economy has forced the Placement

“Placement Efforts,” continued from page 16



Elmer Ignacio ('01)

Office to be more aggressive and creative,” said Placement Office Director Elmer Ignacio ('01). “We are instituting programs and initiatives never done in the past.”

In addition to the most visible programs offered by the office—On-Campus Interviews and Resume Referral—employers and job seekers now have the ability to connect via videoconferencing.

For example, this spring, Grant Fridkin Pearson Athan & Crown P.A., and Wicker, Smith, O'Hara, McCoy & Ford, P.A., both interviewed Florida State Law students by videoconference. The Placement Office also electronically compiles and maintains books of recent graduates' resumes for specific geographic areas in Florida as well as Atlanta and Washington, D.C.



Christine Guard

In addition to adding new programs, the law school hired Christine Guard in 2009 as a J.D. placement advisor. Guard, an assistant attorney general for the Criminal Appeals Section of the Florida Attorney General's office since 2005 and a 1999 Tulane University Law School graduate, was instrumental in assisting 2009 graduates with their job searches.

She now counsels recent and upcoming graduates and conducts special programming on topics like interviewing and networking.

The Placement Office also has a new assistant director, Becky Marsey, whose responsibilities include coordinating On-Campus Interviews, counseling students and reaching out to employers. Marsey's previous experience includes providing placement assistance to non-traditional students.

Alumni Involvement

Both Weidner and Ignacio emphasize that the Placement Office would not be nearly as successful without help from alumni. Both regularly receive calls from alumni who want to

help students find jobs. They welcome any alumni assistance, including opportunities for unpaid internships.

After recruiting and hiring recent Florida State Law graduates, Dogali has been pleased with the results. Three of the latest associates his firm has hired—Shelly Gentner ('07), Justin Hemlepp ('08) and Lindsay Galloway ('10)—are from Florida State Law. “It is not so much alma mater loyalty as it is the quality of the candidates—they were just terrific,” said Dogali. “One of the things I like about candidates coming from FSU is the add-on experience that I had as a law student there. In comparison to other cities in Florida and elsewhere, there are a lot of opportunities in Tallahassee that are afforded to a law student in the nature of clerkships and internships.”

Because large firms are limiting their number of hires during the downturn, Dogali's firm has access to candidates it might not have had in the past. “Justin is an amazing candidate and an example of the current marketplace,” said Dogali, who posted the position that eventually became Hemlepp's through the Placement Office. “Justin is the kind of candidate that a smaller firm like mine would have had difficulty competing for in the past. It's a different employment market now.”

Even if an alumnus does not have a vacant position at his or her office, there are many ways to help.

“In addition to directly hiring our students and graduates, alumni can help our placement efforts simply by notifying us of any job opportunities they know about,” Ignacio said. “Another way alumni can help is to take a phone call or respond to an e-mail if a student reaches out to you.” Ignacio added that students understand alumni may not be in a position to hire them, but they reach out for advice or information. Sometimes, they simply want to educate themselves about a particular area of practice or geographic area.

More than 600 graduates have made themselves available to provide job search advice as part of the Placement Mentors program. For more information about how you can help, to notify the law school of job vacancies or to volunteer to be a Placement Mentor, contact the Placement Office at 850.644.4495 or placement@law.fsu.edu or contact the dean directly at dweidner@law.fsu.edu.