

International Law

1. What is *international law*? What does it cover?

Although international law deals with treaties between nations and governmental organizations, the majority of the practice is comprised of practicing other specialties on the international level. International law is regarded as a specialty because it has some particular dynamics that require special skills. For example, much like a Utah attorney cannot practice law in Texas without taking the Texas bar, an attorney who chooses to practice in Honduras must take the bar required for Honduras. This enables an American attorney to practice the law native to the foreign country they choose to practice in. If an American attorney wants to practice American law but still live abroad, they are not authorized to give legal advice on anything that is not American law. Many attorneys do the latter and provide consultation on American law for companies and firms in foreign nations. The skills that come into play in this area are how to adapt to different kinds of legal systems and how to work affectively with foreign lawyers. Networking is very important and it is best accomplished if an attorney knows another language. Those interested in this field of law need to be open minded and willing to think outside the box of the U.S. legal system. They need to understand the legal and ethical way of getting the job done within the system they are working in.

2. What does an attorney do who works in *international law*?

International law attorneys who work in the public sector deal with international organizations and work with human rights issues or consult local counsel on human rights losses. They litigate in the international community in attempts to change public policy. Transactional lawyers work in the private sector and help their clients do business with foreign companies. They help their clients understand the consequences of doing business abroad and also consult companies who hire employees outside of the United States. Attorneys who practice international law either practice law in the United States and work with international clients or they live abroad and consult foreign clients on American law.

3. What is an average day like for an attorney who practices *international law*?

For the first few years as a new attorney in the field, the days are long and arduous because those are the demands of working with foreign countries. A lot of time is spent on the telephone with conference calls, e-mailing and sending faxes back and forth during odd hours of the night. Since traveling is so expensive, technology is heavily relied on to communicate with clients. Aside from that, much time is also spent drafting documents and contracts that deal with different international law applications. The opportunity to travel is dependent on the seniority of the attorney as well as on the willingness of the client abroad to pay for the expenses.

4. What is the average salary for an attorney who practices *international law*?

Even though you might have some human rights activist attorneys who make peanuts or big partners billing 500\$ an hour, the average salaries depend primarily on the size of the firm and the clients you have. International law does not differentiate in salary compared to any other kind of specialty. Usually, if you work with a major firm you draw much of your percentage from your expected annual earnings with a computation at the end of your fiscal year where the profits of the firm are divided up with the partners who share the equity. Afterwards, you get a chunk of your earnings at the end.

5. Is there currently a demand for *international law* attorneys?

Yes, there is a strong demand for attorneys in this field and the demand is going to grow as long as people are still participating in international business and commerce. Since the global economy is much more international in scope with agreements like NAFTA and KAFTA, etc., trade between countries has increased which will increase the potential for disputes. Also, the United States has been more involved in international debates after the tragedy of September 11th, which will further open more opportunities for attorneys to practice their specialty in an international setting.

6. Is there more of a demand for *international law* attorneys in one area of the country over another?

If you look at the globe you could pretty much spot the hot areas for international law practice. Dallas and Houston have a lot of dealings with Mexico and South America. New York City is the most highly international business center in the world. Chicago is busy because of the multinational corporations there. Seattle always has an affinity with the Pacific Rim and Far East. Los Angeles and San Francisco also work with the Pacific Rim. Washington D.C. also has a lot of work because it is the international hub for the U.S. The cities are mentioned are not the only ones that have job opportunities because any major city is going to have clients that are dealing with businesses in different countries.

7. How difficult is it for students right out of law school to get a job in *international law*?

Getting a job in international law is difficult regardless considering there is no such thing as a true specialization in international law. Students who do get jobs working in the international community do so because they have the necessary credentials. This means they are at the top ten percent of their class, they have foreign language capabilities and they are familiar with common law and commercial civil codes learned in law school.

8. In what type of a work situation can an attorney practice *international law*? Big firm? Small firm? Government work?

You can practice international law in any firm size. The varying factor is what kind of clients you can pull in.

9. What are the most rewarding things about practicing *international law*?

International law is interesting, fun and exciting. The glitz and glamour of international business travel is fun but it is typically comprised of the airport, the office, the hotel, the office, and then the airport again. This schedule is not surprising considering clients are paying for you to be out there working and not for you to sightsee. Some people just have it in their blood and that's just what makes sense to open-minded people who are willing to respect different cultures. It is also nice to use acquired foreign language capabilities and to work with people from different countries. It is interesting to work in different legal systems.

10. What are the most difficult things about practicing *international law*?

Dealing with unresponsive attorneys is difficult because some of these people are very laid back and it takes them forever to reply. Thinking outside the box of U.S. legal training is difficult. It is also hard to understand how other legal systems operate and still get the job done. International law is not an entity unto itself. It is merely the application of legal principles in dealings with organizations and countries that cross ways. You need to understand the law of your own as well as other countries. Need to keep the mastery of your subject matter. Your principle responsibility is to stay educated on your main specialty. It's hard to figure out what international law rules need to be abided by, who is in charge and of what.

11. For students who are interested in practicing *international law*, are there certain undergraduate classes they should take? Majors that are better? Minors that are better?

Although anything related to international affairs is good, it is generally helpful to have exposure to different cultures and good foreign language training. Any foreign language is good to know, but Mandarin, Cantonese and Arabic are very helpful considering the growing opportunities there. Accounting or business classes are helpful for law school in general. This is also true with intense writing classes. Most of all, it is important to choose a major that you can rely on if law school falls through because going to law school does not guarantee automatic wealth. You do not build up equity as a lawyer because your inventory is your time.

12. For students who are interested in practicing *international law*, would it be better to go to a school that holds itself out as having a specialty in *international law* or just the best ranked law school the student can get into?

Go to the best law school you can get into and can afford. Don't get into debt. If you're going to work on Wall Street then go to the top ten law schools, but if not, then don't get in debt. Debt is worth it for Ivy League schools but not for any other. If a student is interested in attending a top law school then he or she should prepare themselves for a lot of debt. It is true that attending a higher ranked school usually helps with more prestigious employment opportunities after law school, but despite the comfortable starting salary a lot of that money is going to go towards paying off law school debt.

13. For students who are interested in practicing *international law*, are there certain law school classes they should take?

Negotiation classes should be mandatory for any specialty. Students need to figure out what their strong points are and how to effectively work to find an advantageous settlement that should be taken. Financial classes are always helpful. Comparative law classes (Napoleonic law) are necessary to get into this kind of law. Immigration law is a good class to take since more people are hiring employees from other countries. Also, unless a student is absolutely sure of what he or she wants to do, taking a survey and a variety of classes before deciding is very helpful. Students should really ponder what subject matters drive them that they could do it everyday for the rest of your lives.

14. For students who are interested in practicing *international law* is there anything else they should do to prepare themselves for that field of law?

Students should not be afraid to try foreign foods. That is just one aspect of the whole 'international law' mindset because students will be in someone else's world and need to learn how to play by different rules. They also need to learn how to smooth over that transition by working hard to make the connections between cultures easier.

In general, it is important to get the best grades you can and get to know your teachers. Make sure that you have learned something in your first four years of college that you can use to support yourself in case law school does not work out. A well rounded business comprehension is also helpful because that's where the vast bulk of work you're going to be doing is.

Information compiled based on interviews with the following attorneys:

Mark W. Romney
University of Arizona College of Law 1981
Vial Hamilton Koch & Knox
Dallas, TX
October 7, 2005

Terry L. Fund
BYU 2004
Kirton & McConkie
Salt Lake City, UT
July 20, 2005