International Law Programs Prepare Students for a Global Career

Some schools teach classes in a foreign language to help students compete for jobs globally.

Aspiring lawyers who want to focus on international issues have several career paths to choose from, experts say. And there’s reason to believe the number of jobs available may increase.

Andrew Guzman, the associate dean for international and advanced degree programs at University of California—Berkeley School of Law, would be surprised if international work was not growing, he said in an email. The importance of international activities of all kinds, such as in diplomacy, on climate change issues and for business-related work, is growing in the U.S. and other countries, and the legal work may follow.

Liz Brundige, executive director of the Avon Global Center for Women and Justice at the Cornell University Law School, has also noticed this trend.

“Our world is just becoming increasingly globalized on a broad level,” she says. Practicing at a law firm may have once meant working within the U.S. on domestic issues, but now it may involve legal practice that spans multiple countries and multiple legal systems.

Prospective law students who aspire to work in international law have a variety of career areas to choose from. They can work at a firm in the U.S. that focuses on international transactions or international litigation, practice at a nonprofit organization, establish a career around international human rights issues or practice in other ways. Many schools offer classes and programs to prepare students for jobs in these fields, but some provide a better foundation than others.
International law experts encourage prospective students to examine three aspects of the law programs they are considering before making a decision on which institution to attend.

**Classes:** A school that's invested in training students for international law will likely offer a variety of courses within this topic, experts say. At Berkeley, students can take classes such as public international law, human rights and humanitarian law, international trade, international investment law or myriad other classes, Guzman says. It all depends on what kind of law career they want to have and their interests.

How the classes are taught can also make a difference in a student's preparedness. "We teach law classes in Spanish and French," says Theresa Kaiser, director of global opportunities at American University's Washington College of Law.

Some of those classes include Libertad de Expresion, which translates to "freedom of expression," and Principles of French Law. Being able to speak a foreign language can be critical for those who want to practice international law, experts say.

If they don't already speak multiple languages, prospective students should ask if it is possible for students to take foreign language classes on the main campus, Kaiser says. "It's just critical to have that second language ability."

**Faculty:** Who teaches the classes can almost be as important as the content of the courses, some say.

"If they don't have international experiences listed on their bio, that would be a red flag," says Kaiser.

**Experiential learning opportunities abroad and at home:** Opportunities to study abroad can be extremely valuable for a student interested in international law, Brundige says. "It really gives them a great grounding really in a different legal culture."

A school that lets students study overseas for short periods or even yearlong stints can be advantageous for students, says Kaiser of American University, because it gives them a range of options for learning while in another country.

One of these options can be joining a student group that participates in competitions. "We send them to competitions around the world," Kaiser says. And sometimes, "they have to compete in a foreign language."

American University students compete in Spanish in Buenos Aires at the Edicion de la Competencia Internacional de Arbitraje Comercial, an international commercial arbitration competition. At Berkeley, Guzman says, a moot court team competes each year in an international competition.