

Finding Your Path in International Law: Paths, Practical Considerations, and Advice from Berkeley Law

Introduction	1
Pathways in International Law	2
Getting Hired	5
During Law School	5
Skills	5
Opportunities at Berkeley Law	6
Networking	6
Narratives from Alumni that Have Been There	7
Frequently Asked Questions	9

Introduction

Goals of the Guide

This guide was written by Berkeley Law students for Berkeley Law students with the goal of compiling advice for students interested in international law careers in both the private and public sector.¹ Recognizing the unique challenges of pursuing a career in international law, students interviewed several Berkeley Law alumni that have either worked or continue to work in international law, and compiled their advice on topics ranging from common pathways to networking. This advice and a range of other helpful sources are included in this guide, with the goal of providing students with a concise and clear guide to finding their path in international law.

Before diving into the substance of the guide, we thought it pertinent to provide a brief overview of the themes that permeate most international law careers, regardless of the specific pathway you pursue. First, international law is a highly dynamic work environment. Substantively and procedurally, international law continues to develop, often outside of the very clear guardrails that define domestic law. Changing political and economic climates also require adaptability in terms of working style and also when seeking employment. As a result, when seeking international law careers, students should be mindful of the need for adaptability and highlight their own adaptability when seeking jobs.

¹ The Berkeley Law Career Development Office would like to thank Lainey Meiri, Nicole Waddick & Faris Alikhan for their outstanding work during summer and fall 2021 in researching, conducting alumni interviews, and writing this guide. We also thank the Miller Institute for its support of this project, including providing expert advice and funding.

Second, in large part due to the dynamic nature of international law, careers in international law can be more unpredictable than domestic legal careers. The changing political and economic climates discussed above, coupled with the lack of a clear, established pathway into international law, mean that finding an international legal position, either while in law school or after graduation, may take longer or require more networking and the development of more personal relationships. However, this unpredictability is also one of the more exciting aspects of international law—careers remain exciting and evolve as you evolve as a lawyer.

Finally, because international law is dynamic and unpredictable, the substance and style of work is constantly evolving. This nature of the work allows for a huge range of pathways available to graduates interested in international law. This guide will provide more in-depth guidance on some of these pathways later in the guide, but it is important to note that a career in international law can be shaped to your interests and skills.

With these themes in mind, we move to the substance of the guide. This guide will first outline different pathways in international law. This list of pathways is by no means exhaustive, and as discussed, there is significant potential for you to forge your own path in international law. However, this discussion of pathways is intended to demonstrate the breadth of careers you can pursue in the field. The guide then moves into a discussion of tips and important considerations for getting hired, building on advice from alumni and employees, and provides access to a spreadsheet of alumni contacts who are currently in or who have worked in some of these fields. The guide also provides suggestions for practical considerations, and then finally concludes with a section on additional advice from alumni, on everything ranging from networking to courses in law school.

Pathways in International Law

Determining which direction to take in international law can be daunting. Below is a list of some overarching categories of careers in international law, organized first by field, and then by type of practice.

Overarching Field	Subject Matter	Possible Pathways	Examples of Relevant Organizations ²
Private Sector	International Arbitration	Many leading firms in private international law come to Berkeley Law’s Early Interview Week, affording one opportunity to interview for firm’s U.S. and some	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Debevoise & Plimpton LLP • Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer • King & Spalding LLP • White & Case

² For an extensive list of international organizations, refer to the Yearbook of International Organizations, updated annually and available through the Berkeley Law Library.

		international offices.	LLP ³
	International Trade	You may also apply directly to these firms, both in the U.S. and internationally, by submitting an application through their online portals or speaking with hiring personnel. Networking is particularly useful when directly applying.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sidley Austin LLP ● White & Case LLP ● Steptoe & Johnson LLP⁴
	Public International Law		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Debevoise & Plimpton LLP ● Foley Hoag LLP ● Freshfields Bruckhaus Deringer⁵
Public Sector and Public Interest	International Tribunals and Courts	Many international tribunals and foreign courts have opportunities to clerk. More guidance can be found here . ⁶	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights ● European Court of Human Rights ● Inter-American Court of Human Rights ● International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea ● World Trade Organization Appellate Body
	Civil Society and Non-Governmental Organizations	There's a range of pathways into civil society and NGOs. Many organizations provide yearlong fellowships that can provide an entry point.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Human Rights Watch ● Center for Justice and Accountability ● Open Society Institute Justice Initiative

³ Drawn from Chambers and Partners list of Band 1 firms for International Arbitration. Available here: <https://chambers.com/legal-rankings/arbitration-international-global-market-leaders-2:57:20987:1>.

⁴ Drawn from Chambers and Partners list of Band 1 firms for International Trade. Available at: <https://chambers.com/legal-rankings/international-trade-wto-global-market-leaders-2:455:20987:1>.

⁵ Drawn from Chambers and Partners list of Band 1 firms for Public International Law. Available at: <https://chambers.com/legal-rankings/public-international-law-global-market-leaders-2:96:20987:1>.

⁶ *Opportunities with International Tribunals and Foreign Courts*. Yale Law School: International Public Interest Law. Available at: https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/department/cdo/document/cdo_internationalpublicinterestlaw_public.pdf

		<p>Examples of organizations with fellowships include Human Rights Watch and Open Society Foundations. You can also apply directly to the organization or through Berkeley Law interview weeks, organized by the Career Development Office. Finally, some large law firms, such as Cleary Gottlieb, have offered short-term fellowships for their associates to work with an NGO. This was one route that an alumni interviewee used to move into her public interest position.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timap for Justice⁷
	Inter-Governmental Organizations	<p>Many inter-governmental organizations have different programs for entry into the organizations. The United Nations (U.N.) has a Young Professionals Programme, used to recruit for career positions with the U.N.. You may also look into the U.N. Volunteer Programme, or look for vacancies on U.N. agency websites. However, opportunities for many entry level positions are limited.⁸</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • United Nations Legal Office • United Nations • International Monetary Fund • World Bank
	Federal Governmental	Some offices hire	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S. Agency for

⁷ Drawn from a list of NGOs that have recently hired Berkeley Law graduates, available here: <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/careers/for-students/public-interest/explore/international-public-interest-public-sector-careers/>

⁸ *International Public Interest Law*. Yale Law School. Available here: https://law.yale.edu/sites/default/files/area/department/cdo/document/cdo_internationalpublicinterestlaw_public.pdf

	Organizations	through Berkeley interview weeks. You may have to apply directly to others.	International Development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. Department of State
	Foreign Governmental Organizations		
Research	Academia	There are generally two paths into academia: 1) obtain your JD and a PhD in some related subject and apply to professor positions, or 2) obtain your JD and work for a few years, ideally publishing significantly both in law school and afterwards, and then apply to a writing fellowship or to professor positions.	N/A

In addition to the examples of organizations listed above, the Berkeley Journal of International Law maintains a database of places where Berkeley students have interned and worked in the past. Exploring this database can help provide ideas of where to start when looking for internships and post-graduate positions.

Getting Hired

Before moving into tips and suggestions for getting hired, it’s important to note the need to be resourceful in seeking an international law career. The need for tenacity and resourcefulness was a theme in nearly all of the interviews conducted with alumni for this guide. We mention this not to discourage, but to reinforce the need to use the resources available to you to find a pathway that fits your goals and interests. There are exciting international law careers that are fully within reach, they may just require more intentionality and thoughtfulness than a domestic career.

During Law School

Skills

Based on a review of alumni responses and available online resources, there are a few skills to note that are particularly valuable. This list is not exhaustive, but provides a starting point as you consider the opportunities available to you while at Berkeley Law. Some of these key skills include:

- **Collaboration:** When asked about important skills that law school did not explicitly teach, alumni consistently emphasized the importance of collaboration. Whether working in the private sector or the public sector, your work will very likely be collaborative and involve working across cultures and language barriers. Alumni strongly emphasize the importance of learning how to collaborate in law school, which can be done through a range of means, particularly experiential opportunities such as clinics and externships.
- **Knowledge of International Law:** Berkeley Law offers a range of courses that will allow you to develop the substantive knowledge necessary to immediately immerse yourself in an international legal position. Key courses may include International Law, International Human Rights Law, or International Business Transactions, although offerings vary year to year. You may also consider a [Certificate of Specialization in International Law](#), which requires a certain amount of credits and work in international law. The International Human Rights Clinic also offers an opportunity for immersion into international legal work in practice.
- **Language Skills:** If you intend to work in a non-English speaking environment, language skills are a critical asset. Language skills can demonstrate your commitment to working internationally and will enable you to work much more effectively. Some organizations may also require proficiency in multiple languages, such as some U.N. organizations, which require proficiency in at least two U.N. working languages. Berkeley Law students usually can pursue language courses on the main campus for law credit with permission from the Dean. Student Services can provide helpful advice on working language courses into your schedule.
- **Demonstrated Commitment and Relevant Experience:** Because international law is a competitive field, with many passionate individuals, it's critical that you can demonstrate your commitment to and interest in the field. You can demonstrate this commitment in a range of ways, such as your courses, extracurriculars such as the Berkeley Journal of International Law, field placements, and positions with professors working in relevant fields.

Opportunities at Berkeley Law

There are a range of opportunities at Berkeley Law to explore your interests in international law and prepare yourself for a career in international law. Each summer, Berkeley provides funding for students that pursue public interest internships, which can go towards international public interest. You may also take a range of classes in international law, depending on your interest (*see* FAQs, What Classes Should I Take?). The International Human Rights Clinic also allows students to immerse themselves in international law and work on a substantive international human rights project while learning about and considering international human rights frameworks. There are also [“Away” Field Placements](#), which allow students to work for an international organization of their choosing and receive up to ten credits at Berkeley Law. Students may also pursue the “Berkeley Law in the Hague Program” or the United Nations Human Rights Program, which allows students to work for a country’s legal team at the Human Rights Council in Geneva for the semester. Students interested in field placements should schedule an advising appointment with the Field Placement director. There are also a range of opportunities for students to work directly with professors for pay or for credit. Students should explore professors that have worked in their interest area and reach out if interested.

Networking

The number one tip for getting hired that alumni shared throughout this project was networking. All interviewees attributed some part of their success in getting hired to networking. However, networking can be intimidating. It can be hard to know where to start, and where to go next when you have. We've distilled a couple of core tips from alumni to help make networking as accessible and enjoyable as possible:

1. Don't hesitate to reach out! Many alumni, professors, and others love talking to students and will likely be more than happy to share their path and advice with you. If you are thinking about reaching out, do it, and set up a brief call or email exchange.
2. Use all of the resources available to you. The Berkeley Career Development Office (CDO) has a huge range of events and contacts that will point you in the right direction. LinkedIn also provides an enormously useful resource, and alumni emphasized to not shy away from reaching out to individuals that you might not have a first-degree connection with. The worst that can happen, provided that you are respectful and professional, is that you do not receive a response. Professors are also an incredible resource, with contacts both in academia and in practice. Working with professors, such as in a teaching-assistant or research-assistant capacity, provides a great opportunity to build a relationship, but also don't hesitate to reach out to professors who you may not have worked with before in the past. [This guide](#) also provides more information on reaching out to the Berkeley alumni network.
3. Don't stop at just one call or contact. At the advice of one alumni, try not to leave any call without a suggestion of at least one more person to speak to.
4. Finally, the best networking is networking that is genuine. The best relationships are those where you genuinely have a connection or shared interests. Although it's important

Narratives from Alumni

Norah Arafah, Class of 2020:

White & Case, Associate, New York Office (Internship in Dubai Office)

What drew you to international law?

I was a freshman in college when the war in Syria started, which is where my family is from and where I spent a lot of time in high school, so that was quite formative, and I knew I wanted to maintain a connection to the region. When I moved to Jordan after college, I saw the impact international law had, had interned at the UN by the time I got to law school, and I wasn't sure that was what I wanted to do afterwards. I started thinking about what are the ways I could have a say in projects and financings that were happening in the Middle East in particular, so I started looking into project finance, and project finance in the Arab World in particular.

There are many resources that can help you out... A lot of corporate law is like that too, there's a lot of templates from the past that can help you out. I also didn't realize how much we would be working in a team. Everything at a firm is in a team. You have to really like the people that you're working with. Ask

people you know, whether that's Berkeley grads, or people from your summer class, or the research team. There are a lot of resources for you if you seek them out.

General Advice

You have to be really resourceful and take initiative... You have to go out of your way to make it work. I did a lot of networking, I got my 1L summer job at White & Case through LinkedIn. I did some research, and realized they had the biggest presence in the Middle East. I really didn't even know what a law firm did coming in, but I looked at White & Case on LinkedIn and had a second-degree connection on LinkedIn who had worked at White&Case. We had a series of calls, and he said, "I think I can get you an interview in Dubai."

It was unpaid, which was very challenging for me, because I wasn't eligible for the Edley Grant. I ended up using miles to fly there and stayed with family friends who I barely knew, and I continued to do work for [a professor] in the summer. It was really hard and I struggled for the summer, but I got my foot in the door. You have to be patient, and really go for it, and make it work for yourself. There are ways to make it happen. Don't be afraid to reach out to people who have jobs that you're interested in... My biggest piece of advice is to network, in all of the ways that you can network.

On collegiality... You have to be professional and know what's acceptable, but there's also a time to be yourself. I think people really appreciate that I'm also a real person.

On choosing a career and a location... You can try something for a few years and if it doesn't work, you can try something different! There's a lot of flexibility. If you want to work internationally, it's usually best to be barred in New York, and then you can also waive into D.C..

What is a typical day in your job at White & Case?

I'm a first year associate. My job was postponed because of COVID so I don't know if my experience has been typical but that doesn't mean I don't feel like I've been a part of a team, or haven't gotten substantive work, but it has been all remote. At this point, I'm in a corporate pool, which means I'm rotating through different corporate practices right now. I chose to do transactional and I'm working on all sorts of different cross-border transactions and financing, some capital markets work, and I've also been able to continue my pro bono work with IRAP (International Refugee Assistance Project). I emailed and expressed interest, and told them about my history working with IRAP, and they immediately put me on a case, with a Berkeley grad actually. I do client calls, sometimes I take the first crack at drafting agreements of deals, there's a lot of email correspondence, it really varies by the deal.

Sarah Hunter, Class of 2018

Attorney Advisor, Department of State

How did you end up in your current position?

I was looking at clerkships and international human rights jobs; I probably started a bit late in the process, probably about the end of 2L. As I understand it, for some fellowships, you might have to start hustling a little bit earlier. I decided I wanted to clerk. I ultimately wanted to work in international law, but I thought

shoring up my legal research and writing skills for another year would be helpful. I ended up going to this little court, the Court of International Trade, which is the Article III authorized court in the U.S.

A lot of people leave the Court of International Trade, and go to firms, a lot of people leave and go to firms, but a lot of people also go to the DOJ or others. If you're interested in the firm thing or government in the trade space, it's a great place to go.

The Department of State operates a bit differently, we're all generalists really. By and large, attorneys rotate among offices. You don't really get a lot of choice where you end up. I'm in my first rotation and I'm in the employment division.

What advice would you give to students considering a career in international law?

The clerkship really helped me, you learn how to write, you learn how to research. With regards to non-legal skills, at least when I was at Berkeley, there was a lot of conversation about how being collegial helps. Generally speaking, you get a lot farther if you know how to be kind and collegial. I also highly recommend going with your gut when thinking about the people that you're going to be working with.

Frequently Asked Questions

What classes should I take?

- There's no one schedule of classes that is ideal for a career in international law. Alumni recommended exposing yourself to a variety of substantive international law topics, allowing you to hit the ground running in your first position. Smaller classes or directed research, where you are able to have substantial class discussions about international law and develop your own beliefs and understandings of the law, are also really helpful. Possible courses to explore include International Law, Comparative Law, International and Foreign Legal Research, and other classes that have cross-cutting issues with international law, such as Transnational Justice or International Environmental Law. For a list of international law classes, visit the Berkeley Law [Schedule of Classes](#) and click "International and Comparative Law" on the Browse by Category column.

Is it important to work abroad?

- Working abroad will be a strength if you are able to manage it. It helps to demonstrate your commitment and passion for international law to potential employers. However, if you are unable to work abroad during law school, there are many other ways to demonstrate your commitment. You can get involved with international journals, organizations, or research.

Is it possible to find a paid job out of law school?

- It depends on what you are looking for. There are many opportunities in the private sector in international law that will pay and likely support the repayment of loans for students that are not pursuing Berkeley Law's Loan Repayment Assistance Program. There are also a range of fellowships that will allow you to find funding for public interest positions right after graduation.

Conclusion

In sum, if you are interested in international law, or think you might be interested in international law, there are many resources available for you to explore. It's a career that requires you to make your own path, but there are many people who walked their path before you and will be happy to share their advice and stories with you. We welcome you to take this guide as a starting point, and continue to explore the opportunities at Berkeley to learn more about how to make an international law career that works for you.