



# Summer Associates Survey: Part 2

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Experience, Compensation and Career Paths

September 2024

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## Background

Law360 Pulse surveyed law students earlier this year about the grueling process of landing a summer associateship. Now, we're checking back in to see how their associateships went. We asked students about how well they were able to hone their legal skills at the summer associate programs they attended and what types of training they received. We also asked them about their own career plans after their experience this summer.

## Methodology

The 583 responses were collected from June 13 to Aug. 11. Respondents included 138 second-year law students (24% of the total), 427 third-year students (73%), and 16 (3%) part-time or evening students, all of whom worked in a summer associate position in the summer of 2024. Fifty-one percent were female, 46% male, and 3% preferred not to disclose their gender. Sixty percent were white, with the next-largest racial categories being Asian (13%), Hispanic or Latino (8%), and Black or African American (7%).

# Introduction

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By Xavier Chauvris and Jack Collens

Law360 Pulse

For law students, the summer associateship at a prestigious firm is a coveted experience, typically following the second year of law school. In the second part of Law360 Pulse's 2024 Summer Associates Survey, those who obtained such positions answered a variety of questions about their experiences.

Roughly three-quarters of respondents participated in 2024 summer associateships following their second year of law school, with another quarter following their first year. A small number of respondents were entering their fourth year or were part-time law students.

Summers reported positive experiences in their positions, with nearly all saying their firms provided fun programming, offered extensive training, and provided ample opportunities for mentorship and to gain valuable experience.

In return for their hard work, summers were well compensated. Though the survey features a strong BigLaw bias, mean and median compensation amounted to an equivalent annual salary of more than \$150,000, with the greatest share earning

Summers reported positive experiences in their positions, with nearly all saying their firms provided fun programming, offered extensive training, and provided ample opportunities for mentorship and to gain valuable experience.

the equivalent of top first-year associate pay for their 10-week programs.

The programs left most respondents with greater clarity in their career choices, particularly among those who intend to pursue careers in the traditional law firm environment.

As of the time they took the survey, more than half said they had been assured by their firms that they would be extended an offer of full-time employment.

# 1. The Top-Scoring Firms

This year as previously, firms received an enthusiastic response overall, with more than three-quarters of respondents lauding them for programs that allowed them to have fun and build up their legal experience. Nearly all said their experience gave them better insight into the kind of law they want to practice.

Dentons and Norton Rose topped the list of firms that excelled in the four critical program areas: confidence-building, networking and mentorship, compensation, and fun programming. Firms had to have a minimum of five respondents to be included.

While almost all respondents said their firms had fun programming and they had access to mentorship, there was considerably more variability in their views of the extent to which the programs provided them with confidence to embark on their careers at law firms.

It was no surprise that respondents perceived their pay as being fair, given that most were paid on the scale set by Cravath Swaine & Moore LLP for first-year associates, amounting to more than \$40,000 for a 10-week position.

RANK	FIRM	PARTICIPANTS	FUN	MENTORSHIP	CAREER CONFIDENCE	COMPENSATION FAIRNESS	OVERALL*
1	Dentons	5	1	1	0.95	1	0.99
2	Norton Rose	8	1	1	0.91	0.97	0.97
3	Morgan Lewis	30	1	1	0.86	0.97	0.96
4	Weil	53	1	0.98	0.86	0.97	0.95
5	King & Spalding	22	1	0.95	0.86	0.98	0.95
6	Eversheds Sutherland	14	1	0.93	0.86	0.96	0.94
7	Holland & Knight	25	1	0.88	0.87	0.99	0.94
8	DLA Piper	34	1	0.97	0.83	0.93	0.93
9	Kirkland	11	1	0.91	0.84	0.98	0.93
10	Sheppard Mullin	34	0.97	0.94	0.83	0.96	0.93
11	Gibson Dunn	26	1	0.96	0.78	0.94	0.92
12	Quinn Emanuel	37	1	0.92	0.79	0.93	0.91
13	White & Case	14	0.93	1	0.75	0.91	0.9
14	FordHarrison	7	0.86	0.86	0.89	0.68	0.82
15	Ogletree	5	0.8	0.6	0.7	0.75	0.71

\* All four components were scaled from 0 to 1, with higher scores indicating greater satisfaction. The overall score is the average of these four components. Figures are rounded to the hundredths place.

## 2. The Summer Associate's Experience

The typical summer associateship in 2024 was a 10-week, in-person position, with only a third saying their position was hybrid and virtually none saying their position was remote-only.

Respondents also reported high levels of compensation, with an average salary of just under \$35,000 and a median of just over \$40,000. The impact of BigLaw pay scales on these results was clear. A 10-week

pay on the so-called Cravath scale would be roughly \$43,000, and nearly 30% of respondents reported earning at least that much. In contrast, 19% reported being paid less than \$20,000 for the summer.

Despite the high pay, only 7% reported receiving a signing bonus. This doesn't appear to influence their perception of the pay package, however, as 91% of all respondents viewed their compensation as fair or very fair.

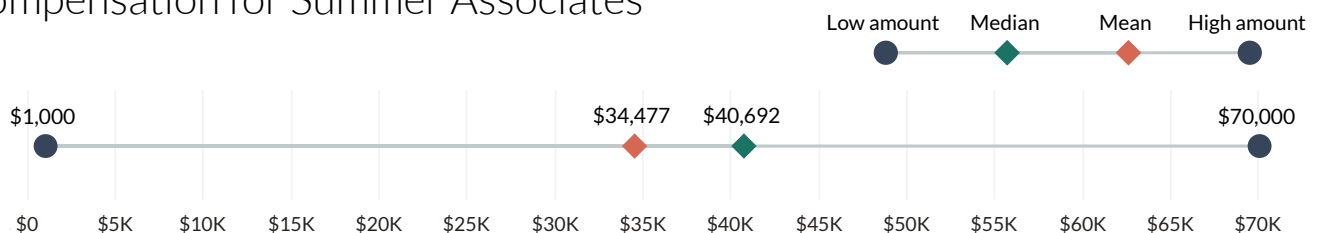
How was your summer associateship conducted?



How long is your summer program?

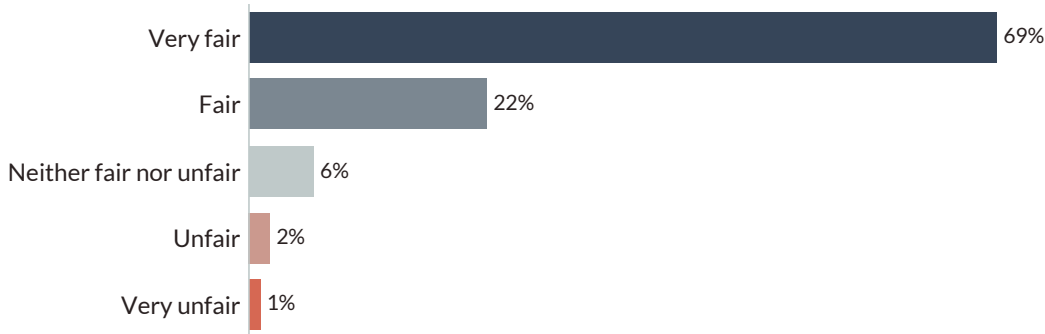


Compensation for Summer Associates





Relative to law school debt and what you know of market conditions and competing firms, how fair do you think your compensation was?



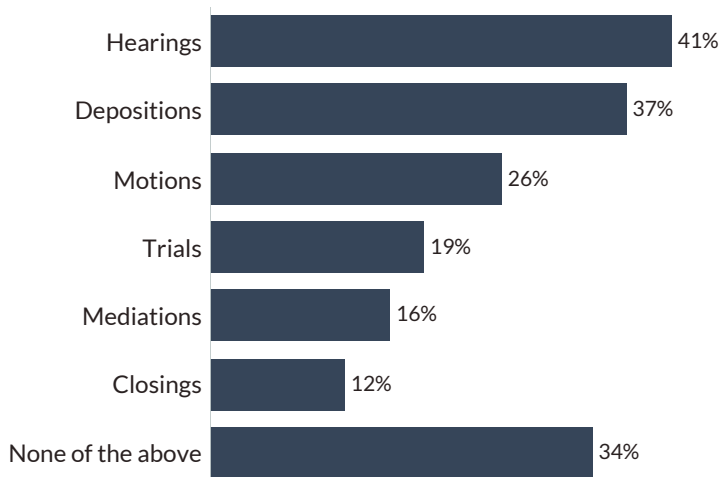
Summers also reported the specific experiences they had in legal proceedings. Nearly two-thirds – 66% – said they were able to accompany firm attorneys to some form of legal proceeding. The most common were hearings and depositions, at 41% and 37%, respectively, though more than a quarter – 26% – also attended motions. Fewer than one in five accompanied firm attorneys to trials, mediations and closings.

The survey also probed the quality of respondents’ experiences during their summer programs. Nearly all respondents –

96% – said they received clear instructions on assignments and that these assignments made good use of the skills they learned in school.

Another 91% of respondents said their firms provided fun programming, a component of the overall firm rankings. In an open-ended question asking about their favorite experiences, respondents cited retreats, cooking classes, mock trial competitions, frequent meals with partners, and trips to Disneyland, baseball games, concerts, Broadway shows, and more.

Were you able to gain courtroom experience by accompanying firm attorneys to any of the following?



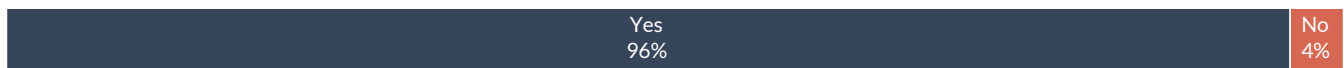
Fewer respondents – 81% – said the criteria on which their performance was judged was made clear. When asked what they wished their firms had done differently during the program, a common response was that summers wished firms had been more clear about expectations in many areas, from billing to event attendance.

Eighty percent of summers said they were able to work on at least one pro bono project. In fact, in open-ended responses,

a fair number of respondents said that pro bono work – criminal defense and immigration clinics, mostly – was one of their favorite experiences of the summer.

While there were ample events to attend, only around a quarter of respondents said they felt pressured to socialize after hours. Such pressure also did not extend to long working hours, as only 14% said they felt compelled to arrive early and stay late to compete with their cohort.

Did your assigned work during the summer associateship make good use of the skills you learned in school?



Did you receive clear instructions on assignments?



Did the firm provide fun programming for summer associates?



Were the criteria on which your performance would be judged made clear from the start?



Did the firm allow you to get involved in pro bono work?



Did you feel pressure to socialize with colleagues after hours?



Did you feel compelled to come early and stay late to be competitive with your class cohort?



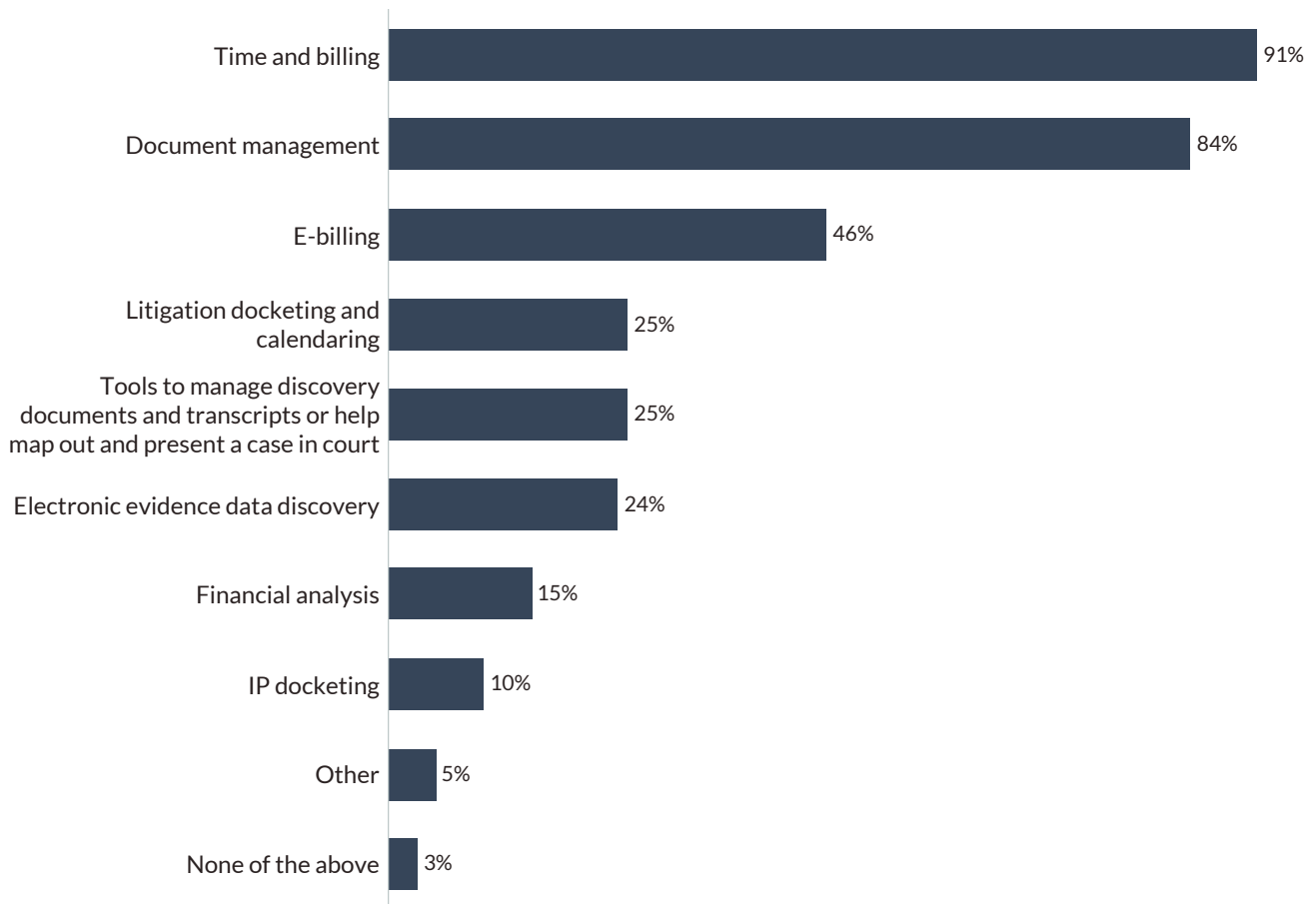


# 3. Training and Supervision

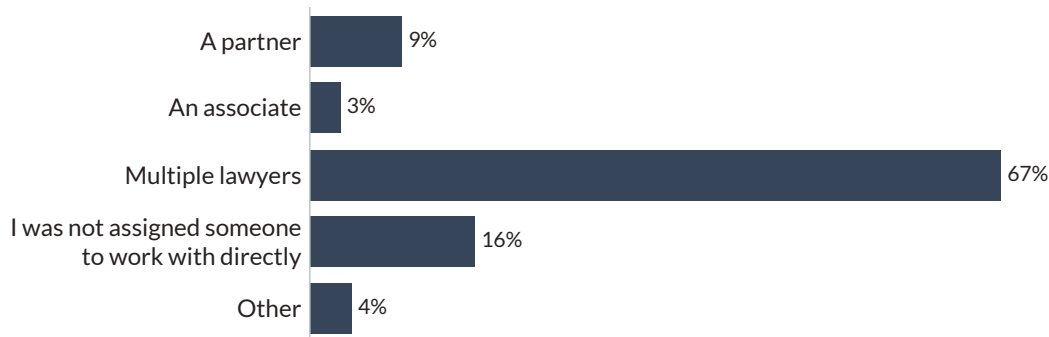
Nearly all firms represented in the survey also trained their summer associates in a variety of software. Overwhelmingly, summers received training in time and billing software, and document

management software, at 91% and 84%, respectively. Nearly half – 46% – were trained in e-billing software. Only 3% received no training in these or other practice-area-specific software.

Did the firm offer you training in software in the following areas?



## I was assigned to work directly with:



Direct supervision by one attorney was not the norm, as two-thirds of respondents were assigned to work directly with multiple firm attorneys. Another 16% seemed to be assigned to floating positions, not working with anyone in particular.

There was no shortage of the hands-on opportunities for networking that

associateships are known for and that in-person attendance affords. Nearly all respondents — 96% — said they were able to make connections with senior attorneys at their firms. Ninety-two percent were given ample opportunities for personalized mentorship and 95% were given the chance to network with others outside their supervisors and summer associate cohorts.

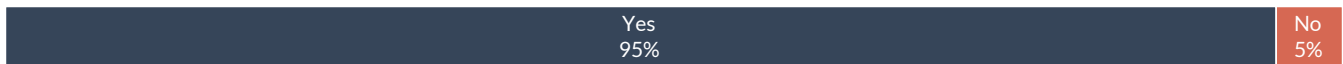
Do you feel you were able to make connections with senior attorneys at the firm?



Did the firm provide ample opportunities for personalized mentorship?



Were you given the opportunity to network with others outside of your supervisors and summer associate cohort?

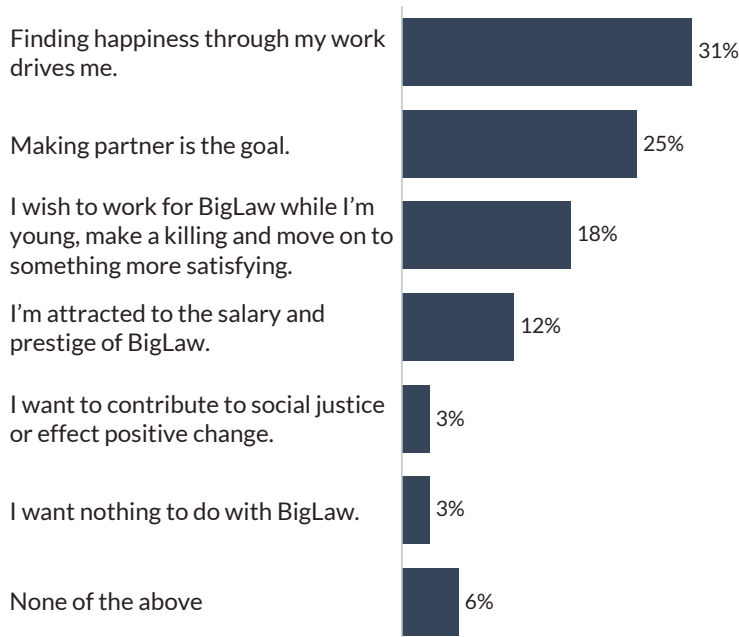


# 4. Looking Ahead

Summers' career aspirations were not uniform despite their obvious enjoyment of their programs. Close to a third – 31% – said they were driven by finding happiness in work, but nearly as many said they were either tempted by the salaries and prestige of BigLaw or interested in BigLaw paychecks

before turning to meaningful work, at 12% and 18%, respectively. A quarter said their primary goal was to make partner. Only 3% said they wished to contribute to social justice efforts or have a positive impact, and a like number said they wanted nothing to do with BigLaw.

Which statement best describes your outlook?



Nearly all of the respondents benefited from their experience of working at firms, with 97% saying it gave them better insight into the kind of law they want to practice. Practice areas figured strongly in open-ended questions, with many respondents saying they found clarity in their preferred areas, or, conversely, that they had wished for more guidance.

### Law firms expect to hire their summers

as a general rule. As of the time they took the survey, 51% of respondents said they had been assured by their firms that they would be extended an offer of full-time employment.

Among those offered such assurances, nearly a third – 32% – were told they would be hired sometime in fall 2024, while 44% said it would be fall 2025 or beyond. Around 20% were not given a time frame.

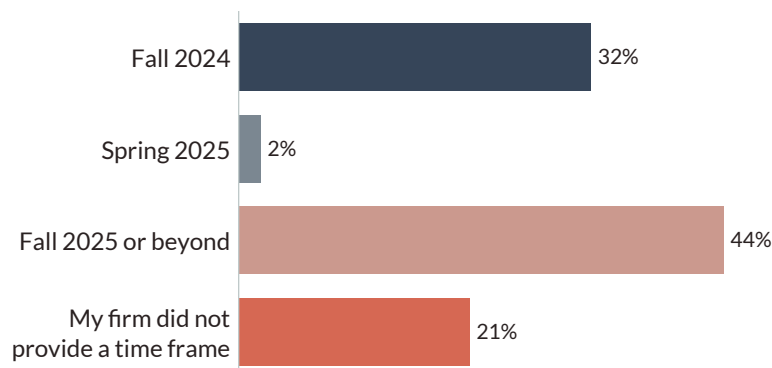
Did your summer associate experience give you better insight into the kind of law you want to practice?



Did your firm assure you it would hire you?



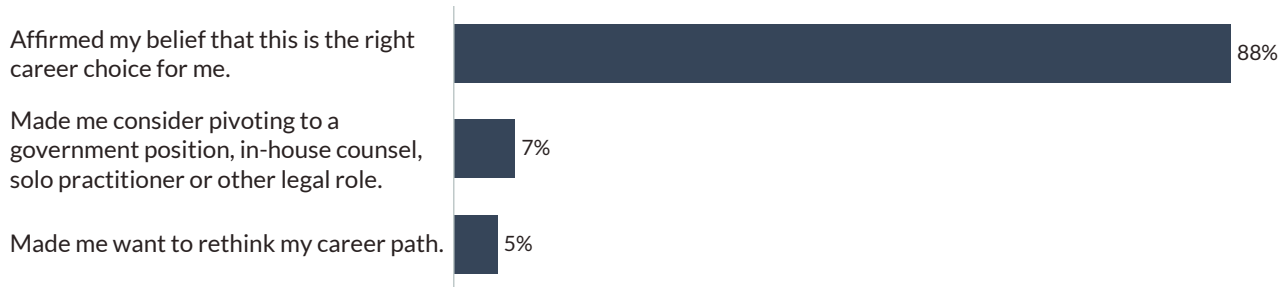
What time frame did the firm provide for that hiring?



The programs appeared to have a positive impact on summers' career plans, with 88% saying the experience affirmed their decision to pursue a career in law. Only 12% of respondents said the summer associateship

made them rethink their plans, with 5% saying they wanted to reconsider their entire career path and 7% saying they intended to pursue a legal career outside the traditional law firm environment.

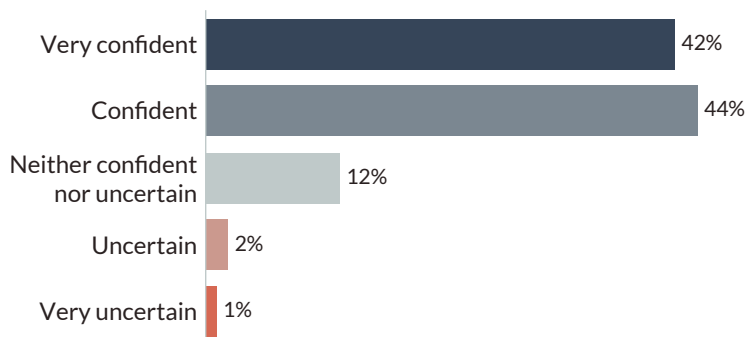
### My summer experience:



Additionally, more than 80% of associates believed their experience prepared them effectively for a career at a law firm. This closely matches the share of those who said the summer associateship affirmed their choice of a law firm career: 90% of those who said their career plans at a firm were affirmed also said they were confident or

very confident that the experience prepared them for life in a law firm. In contrast, fewer than 60% of summers whose experiences made them either rethink their career path or consider a legal career outside the traditional law firm felt confident the summer experience prepared them for their futures.

### How confident are you that your summer associate experience has left you fully prepared to embark on a career at a law firm?

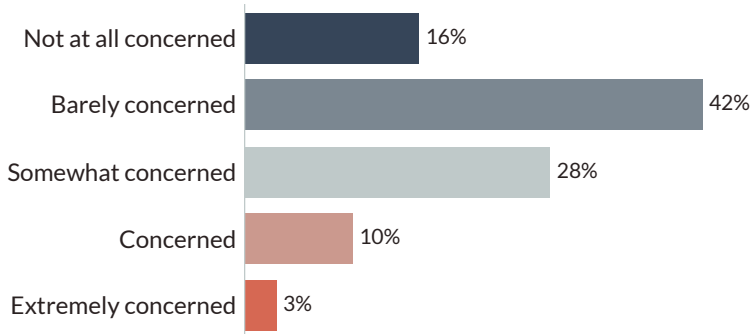




Interestingly, despite mixed attitudes in the legal community about the rise of artificial intelligence, a majority of summer associates respondents – 58%

– said they were barely concerned or not concerned at all that the budding technology will render certain legal jobs obsolete.

As someone just starting out in their career, how concerned are you with the prospect of AI rendering certain law jobs obsolete in the not too distant future?

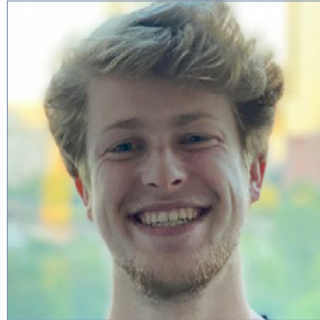


# Meet the Team

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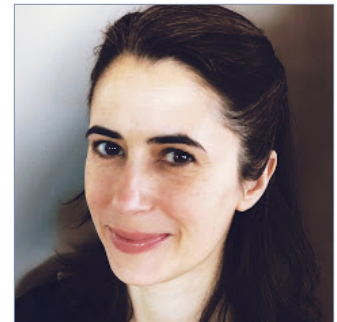
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**Chris Yates**  
Art Director



**Jacqueline Bell**  
Director of Series,  
Surveys & Data



# Questionnaire

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**What firm do you work for?**

**What law school do you go to?**

**What year of law school will you be in at the start of the next academic year?**

- 2L
- 3L
- 4L (part-time)
- Evening student

**How long is your summer program?**

- Less than 9 weeks
- 9 weeks
- 10 weeks
- 11 weeks
- More than 11 weeks

**In total, how much are you being paid for your summer associateship?**

**Did your firm offer you a signing bonus?**

- Yes
- No

**How was your summer associateship conducted?**

- Entirely in person
- Partially in person and partially remotely
- Remotely

**Did your assigned work during the summer associateship make good use of the skills you learned in school?**

- Yes
- No

**Did you receive clear instructions on assignments?**

- Yes
- No

**Were the criteria on which your performance would be judged made clear from the start?**

- Yes
- No

**Did the firm allow you to get involved in pro bono work?**

- Yes
- No

**Did you feel compelled to come early and stay late to be competitive with your class cohort?**

- Yes
- No

**What was the most valuable lesson you learned during your summer associateship?**

**I was assigned to work directly with:**

- A partner
- An associate
- Multiple lawyers
- I was not assigned someone to work with directly
- Other (please specify)

**Were you able to gain courtroom experience by accompanying firm attorneys to any of the following?**

- Depositions
- Hearings
- Motions
- Trials
- Mediations
- Closings
- None of the above

**Do you feel you were able to make connections with senior attorneys at the firm?**

- Yes
- No

**The firm offered me training in software in the following areas:**

- Document management
- Time and billing
- E-billing
- Financial analysis
- Electronic evidence data discovery
- Tools to manage discovery documents and transcripts or help map out and present a case in court
- Litigation docketing and calendaring
- IP docketing
- Other (please specify)
- None of the above

**Did the firm provide ample opportunities for personalized mentorship?**

- Yes
- No

**What would you have liked your firm to do differently during your summer program?**

**Were you given the opportunity to network with others outside of your supervisors and summer associate cohort?**

- Yes
- No

**Please describe how the firm culture matched or differed from what was portrayed during the hiring process.**

**Did you feel pressure to socialize with colleagues after hours?**

- Yes
- No

**Did the firm provide fun programming for summer associates?**

- Yes
- No

**What was your favorite experience of your summer associate program?**

**Did your summer associate experience give you better insight into the kind of law you want to practice?**

- Yes
- No

**Which statement best describes your outlook?**

- Making partner is the goal.
- I wish to work for BigLaw while I'm young, make a killing and move on to something more satisfying.
- Finding happiness through my work drives me.
- I want to contribute to social justice/effect positive change.
- I'm attracted to the salary and prestige of BigLaw.
- I want nothing to do with BigLaw.
- None of the above

**Did your firm assure you they would hire you?**

- Yes
- No

## **What time frame did they provide for that hiring?**

- Fall 2024
- Spring 2025
- Fall 2025 or beyond
- My firm did not provide a time frame.

## **My summer experience:**

- Affirmed my belief that this is the right career choice for me.
- Made me want to rethink my career path.
- Made me consider pivoting to a government position, in-house counsel, solo practitioner or other legal role.

## **Relative to law school debt and what you know of market conditions and competing firms, how fair do you think your compensation was?**

- Very fair
- Fair
- Neither fair nor unfair
- Unfair
- Very unfair

## **As someone just starting out in their career, how concerned are you with the prospect of AI rendering certain law jobs obsolete in the not too distant future?**

- Extremely concerned
- Concerned
- Somewhat concerned
- Barely concerned
- Not at all concerned

## **How confident are you that your summer associate experience has left you fully prepared to embark on a career at a law firm?**

- Very confident
- Confident
- Neither confident nor uncertain
- Uncertain
- Very uncertain

### **What is your age?**

- 20-29
- 30-39
- 40-49
- 50-59
- 60-69
- 70-79
- 80-89
- 90+

### **What is your gender?**

- Female
- Male
- Nonbinary/third gender
- Prefer not to disclose

### **Which best describes your race or ethnicity?**

- White (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Black or African American (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- American Indian or Alaska Native (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (Not Hispanic or Latino)
- Two or More Races
- Prefer not to identify

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