

Student Professionalism and Employment Standards

Student Professionalism and Employment Standards: The legal profession is built upon the highest ethical and professional standards. Legal employers are reporting greater frustration with the lack of professionalism exhibited by law students and new associates. The legal community is tight-knit and even a seemingly minor incident of unprofessional conduct can adversely impact your future. Employers may assume that a student's inappropriate behavior can transcend into the law office and their practice.

The Center for Career Services (CCS) is committed to helping all law students learn and demonstrate professionalism and ethical conduct throughout law school, including during the recruiting and employment process. As a UF Law student, you are reminded to model professionalism in all of your daily interactions with classmates, law school staff, administrators, professors and work colleagues.

1. **Professional Development STARTS NOW:** Are you aware of your on-line persona? Please review information about yourself available on the Internet from sites such as Google, Yahoo, My Space, Facebook and blogs. View them from the perspective of a future employer or bar investigator. Be mindful that unprofessional behavior can prevent you from clearing employer background checks which may be more stringent than a state bar's character and fitness check.
2. **Your Reputation in Law School:** The reputation you begin to establish on your first day of law school will follow you into the workplace and beyond. Professionalism and integrity are the hallmark of your career. Meet all deadlines, keep all appointments, honor all commitments and adhere to all rules and policies. Your failure to do so may call your character into question and impair your reputation.
3. **Resumes:** Resumes must be 100% accurate. Resumes are verified by potential employers. Misstating or mischaracterizing grades, honors, employment or other information on your resume is inappropriate and can be fraudulent. If you are unsure about how best to describe certain information, please check with a CCS professional counselor before including it on your resume.
4. **Recruitment and Interviewing Process:** During the recruitment and interview process it is critical to remain professional and respectful of the legal employers, and your classmates. Research employers' practice areas, the work culture and office locations before you bid or submit your credentials for consideration for an interview. Only submit your resume to the legal employers for whom you would accept a position if it were

offered. You do not want to be perceived as having wasted a legal employer's time nor to have deprived your classmates of potential interviews.

5. **Callback interviews:** It is unprofessional to hoard callback interviews (subsequent interviews at the employers' office where you travel to employers' offices) unless you have a genuine interest in the employer. Remember to promptly send a thank you letter following your callback interview. Promptly and graciously decline callback interviews or offers from firms with whom you are no longer seriously considering.
6. **Offers:** Both student and employer expectations and obligations regarding extending and accepting offers of employment are outlined in the *NALP Standards for the Timing of Offers & Decisions* available at www.nalp.org. Lawyers and firm recruiters do talk to those in other firms. Be mindful that holding open multiple offers will not ultimately benefit your reputation in the legal community. When you release an offer, it may well be extended to one of your UF Law classmates. Therefore, it is not only unprofessional, but also discourteous to hold offers open that you do not intend to accept. While you have an offer under consideration, remember to maintain regular contact with the firm to keep them informed of your status and to reaffirm your continued interest.
7. **Accepting the Offer:** Please remember that accepting an offer from an employer represents a serious commitment. It is, thus, highly recommended that you carefully consider an offer before accepting. Make sure you fully intend to honor the commitment once you have indicated your decision. A CCS professional counselor can always help you assess your options to determine the best fit for you.
8. **Rescinding offers:** Rescinding your summer or permanent job acceptance is unprofessional conduct that may hurt your reputation in the legal community. In the event that your circumstances change and you are weighing whether to back out of a decision, please talk to a CCS professional counselor BEFORE calling the employer. We want to help you do what is in the best interest of your professional career and reputation and we also must maintain a solid working relationship with all legal employers for the benefit of the law school.
9. **Working and the Unlicensed Practice of Law (UPL):** You should be mindful that there are limits to the work you legally can perform as a law student without violating Florida Bar rules and state law prohibiting the unlicensed practice of law. Law students and law graduates yet to be sworn in to the Bar may not practice law or give even free legal advice. To prevent being placed in a situation where you could be called upon to render a "legal opinion", you should not conduct legal research for a non-

lawyer. Unless the legal research is being performed under the supervision and guidance of a licensed attorney, the “legal opinion” can be construed as practicing law without a license. Ask before you act.

10. **Technology:** Cell phones and other PDA’s should never be brought to or used during an interview, or while working or in the courthouse. Likewise, it is also inappropriate to take your lap top to an interview.
 - If you are working for a legal employer, be sure you know the office’s internet and email policy. Remember, deleted internet sites and email messages can be retrieved and can be discoverable. Be sure you are not misusing your Westlaw or Lexis student account.
 - Learn about data mining, a dicey new ethical problem for legal employers.
 - Never send an email message that you would not want to read on the front page of the newspaper. Remember the infamous email exchange between a recent law school grad and a prospective employer that was laughed about across the world? If not, just type, “bla-bla-bla” into Google.

Further information: Nalp's Open Letter to Students About Employer's Perspective of the Hiring Process offers additional guidance on the employment process. http://www.nalp.org/assets/795_openstu07.pdf