

Nonlawyer Careers in the Law

Legal assistants, also known as **paralegals**, are assistants to lawyers. They interview clients, conduct legal research, and draft legal documents under the supervision of lawyers. There are about 100,000 legal assistants in the U.S. Many colleges, as well as for-profit private schools, offer paralegal training. The website for the ABA's Standing Committee on Legal Assistants has helpful information (www.abanet.org/legalassts).



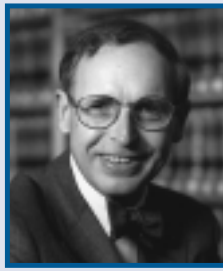
Paralegal
Nancy Heller

Mediators help people resolve disputes without going to court. They meet with the people involved, listen to the problem, discuss options, and help the parties come to agreement. Mediation is a rapidly growing field. Mediators are often lawyers, social workers, or mental health professionals who have participated in a brief mediation training program.

Court workers include **court reporters**, who record everything said as part of the formal trial (there are nearly 50,000 court reporters in the U.S.). Court reporting is taught at about 250 colleges and private business schools. Training programs generally take two to four years. A high school diploma and strong English skills are a must. For a listing of schools approved by the National Court Reporters Association see their website (www.verbatimreporters.com).

For More About Legal Careers

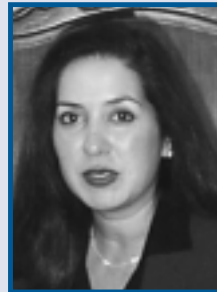
You can find more about legal careers in the ABA booklet *A Life in the Law* (PC# 235-0036, \$2.50, call 800-285-2221 to order). The home page of the ABA's Section of Legal Education includes much helpful information (www.abanet.org/legaled). For more about the law school experience and selecting a law school, access the home page of the Law School Admission Council (www.lsac.org).



Law School Dean
Harry Haynsworth



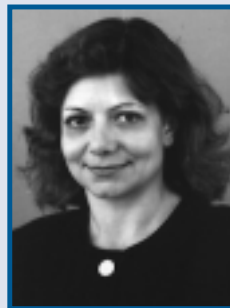
Court Reporter
Carl Saucedo



County Attorney
Rosanna Vazquez



City Council Member
Carroll Robinson



Media Lawyer
Kelli Sager

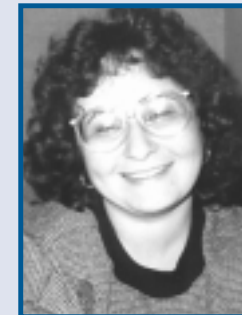
LEGAL CAREERS



Sole Practitioner
Alison Velez Lane



Corporate Counsel
Peter M. Suzuki



Mediator
Cookie Levitz



Assistant Secretary for
Indian Affairs
Kevin Gover

DIVISION FOR
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Careers in the Law

Almost one million lawyers work to assure the principle of equal justice under law to the people of the United States. The field has grown swiftly in recent decades, with the number of lawyers up by more than 400% since the 1950s.

A **lawyer** is both an advisor and an advocate. As an *advisor*, a lawyer

- informs clients about the legal consequences of proposed actions
- drafts legal agreements, and
- helps put tangled affairs in order through counseling and negotiation.

As an *advocate*, a lawyer represents a client in court. A lawyer also advocates on behalf of clients in other settings, such as resolving disputes out of court.

All lawyers—even those in private practice—are **officers of the court**. They are highly regulated by court rules, as well as by laws and the professional ethics rules.

Judge
Beverly Nettles-Nickerson

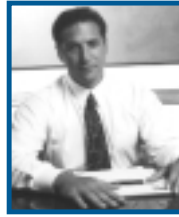


Some lawyers have been appointed or elected to serve as **judges**. Judges preside in the courtroom. In a jury trial, they rule on points of law and tell the jury about the law that governs the case. If there is no jury, the judge determines the facts, rules on motions, resolves disputes, and issues the judgment. There are about 30,000 judges in the U.S.

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Peter Suzuki, ABA Journal/Michael Paras

Becoming a Lawyer

Being a lawyer usually requires a college degree and a degree from a law school. Law school takes three years of full-time study or four- or five-years of part-time study. Then, in almost all states, the graduate must pass a rigorous test, called the bar exam, to get a license to practice law.



Public Service Lawyer
Jeff Bleich

Lawyers at Work

Most lawyers spend much of their time outside of the courtroom and are encouraged by judges to settle disputes without a trial.

Lawyers' work can include defending or prosecuting those accused of committing crime (criminal law) or representing persons, businesses, and the government in such matters as contracts and real estate transactions (civil law). Lawyers

- talk to clients and to others on behalf of clients;
- research legal issues;
- draft contracts, wills, and other documents; and
- counsel, mediate, and negotiate settlements.

Some lawyers specialize in advising corporations; some concentrate on taxation or on wills, trusts, and estate planning; some practice public interest law, for example working to protect the environment.

About 10 percent of lawyers work for various governmental units in either civil or criminal law. A much smaller number become teachers of law. Others become judges.

Others use their legal skills and education in other fields. Some lawyers are corporate executives, bankers, legal affairs reporters, or school administrators.

Skills Needed to Be a Lawyer

The qualities needed for a successful legal career are, attention to detail, thoroughness of preparation, and integrity and high ethical standards.

Other important abilities include

- skill in applying applicable law to the facts of each case;
- a good vocabulary;
- sound reasoning skills;
- the ability to understand complex written material, as well as to write clearly and concisely;
- a good memory; and
- the ability to communicate well orally. It's also important to be able to listen well.

Lawyers interested in a career in a courtroom also need the ability to think quickly on their feet, speak with ease and authority in public, pursue details and understand courtroom strategy.

WHERE DO LAW SCHOOL GRADUATES WORK?

Sources: National Association for Law Placement survey of 1998 graduates six months after graduation.

