



So, You Want to Become a Law School Professor?

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Have you ever looked at your law school professor and wondered what it took to get there? Do you know what it takes to become a law school professor? All of your law school professors have a few things in common. They all possess great credentials, and they are committed to scholarship and teaching.

Although the path to legal academia is not as clearly defined as that of other traditional legal careers, there are certain steps you should take to prepare for a career in teaching law. In this article are information and advice to help you become a law school professor.

The first thing that you will need to do to become a law professor is obtain the necessary educational background. Obtaining the necessary educational background means obtaining a Juris Doctor degree. It also means making sure that you graduate at the top of your class. The typical law professor graduated in the top 5% to 25% of his or her class. To be competitive you should aim for the top 5% of your class.

Also, to be competitive you should attend a prominent law school. One-third of law professors come from schools like Yale, Harvard, and Stanford. You may want to consider obtaining an advanced degree, such as an LLM, an MBA, or a PhD, as well. It will help boost your credentials. Additionally, there are post-JD fellowship programs aimed at bringing law graduates into the teaching field.

Next, you should write as much as you can. Being a law professor is not just about teaching; there is a scholarly aspect to being a law professor. Law schools put a lot of weight on your writing ability because they are evaluated, in part, based on the caliber of their faculties' scholarship.

Since so much weight is given to the scholarship of the faculty at a school when ranking law schools, law schools, in turn, put a lot of emphasis on scholarship when hiring law professors. Therefore, publishing work both during and after law school is important. Your published work should appear in law journals, law reviews, and other scholarly sources.

You should get experience in the area you wish to teach in and become an expert in that field. A great way to gain relevant experience is by working at an elite law firm in that particular area of law. Also, you can work for a high-profile government agency like the Environmental Protection Agency, Securities and Exchange Commission, Department of Justice, US Attorney's Office, or Public Defender's Office or for certain state agencies.



Another way to gain experience is by clerking for a federal judge, preferably an appellate judge or supreme court judge. An additional way to gain experience is by becoming a research assistant for your law professors while you're in school. This will give you a chance to learn more about your area of interest, see what professors do, and obtain mentoring.

If you find that you aren't really interested in scholarship, but you are interested in teaching, then you should consider obtaining an adjunct faculty position, clinical professor position, or legal research and writing professor position. As an adjunct professor, you usually aren't required to write as much as a tenure-track faculty member because typically you are working a full-time job somewhere else in addition to teaching part-time.

As far as clinical professor positions and legal research and writing professor positions are concerned, law schools tend to place more emphasis on teaching and working with the students than on scholarship. Although the writing requirement is not as demanding for these types of positions, many law schools do require some publishing.

Once you obtain the necessary credentials and published works, you should network and utilize your resources. Three great ways to network are through the professors at your law school, through conferences on your area of interest, and through regional meetings on your area of interest. Two great resources to utilize in obtaining a law teaching position are the Association of American Law Schools (AALS) and Legal Authority.

For a fee you can have the AALS provide your resume and cover letter, along with the other 700-plus resumes it gets, to all the accredited and unaccredited law schools in the country. Once you submit your resume to the AALS, you wait for law schools to call you to set up an interview at the annual recruitment conference held by AALS every year, which has been called "the meat market."

Also for a fee you can sign up with Legal Authority to assist you in providing your resume and cover letter to law schools. Once you submit the resume and cover letter prepared by Legal Authority to law schools, you wait for law schools to call you and set up an interview. Once you secure an interview, Legal Authority can coach you through the interviewing process.

So, that's my advice on the things you should do to become a law professor. Following this advice is certainly not the only way to become a law school professor. As you know, there are always exceptions to the rule. However, the advice that I have given is the advice that is given by most professors and others knowledgeable about the selection process for law professors.

Good luck in your endeavor to become a law professor!