

# Bridge-to-Practice Program Survey Findings

A “bridge-to-practice” program is defined as a program to provide recent law school graduates with an opportunity to develop and enhance their practical legal skills as they transition into the practice of law, generally by providing funding of some sort for a period of post-graduate work in one of several kinds of legal workplaces.

Typically, third-year students or recent graduates may apply for funding for a defined term project with an approved employer. Fellowships are typically subject to pre-approval, may or may not require proof of hours or projects completed, and may be paid on an hourly, lump sum, or other basis.

Bridge-to-practice programs are generally funded in whole or in part by a law school, university, or related organization for work performed for a third party (e.g., public interest organization, government agency, member of the judiciary, or private employer). Bridge-to-practice programs are thus distinct from law school-funded jobs on campus, such as, for example, as research assistants.

In order to measure the prevalence of such programs and to document their structures and policies, NALP conducted a survey in fall 2012. The survey was developed with the assistance of, and vetted by, a small working group of NALP law school members. A total of 84 schools responded to the survey, representing all U.S. NALP regions, a range of sizes, and both public and private schools. Of these, 46, or 55%, reported having a bridge-to-practice program, as defined for this survey. It is likely that this percentage is not typical of the entire school population, to the extent that schools without such a program may not have been inclined to participate in the survey, even though the survey was designed to be applicable to all schools. It is also the case that the reported bridge-to-practice programs are more common among schools with 750 or more JD students and at private schools. For example, over half the schools with a bridge-to-practice program that responded to the survey have 750 or more students, and two-thirds are private schools. Almost 60% of schools with a bridge-to-practice program also characterized their school as being in a metropolitan area with a population of one million or more, and an additional 20% characterized their school as being in a metropolitan area with a population of 100,000-999,999.

## Key Findings

- Of the schools with a bridge-to-practice program, 22% have had the program since 2007 or earlier, 11% started in 2008, 22% started in 2009, 33% date from 2010, 6% started in 2011, and 6% started in 2012. The findings presented below are based on those 43 schools whose program started in 2011 or earlier.
- These programs are typically run by the career services office (84%). In a few cases where the responsibility lies elsewhere than in the CSO, the public interest center was most often noted.
- Fellowship opportunities are most often identified by both students/graduates and staff (65%). One-quarter of schools reported that only students/graduates identify opportunities, and just a handful reported that only staff identify the opportunities.
- Fellowships are most often for 6 months or less, as shown in **Table 1**.

**Table 1. Duration of Fellowships**

3 months or less	47%
4-6 months	53%
7-9 months	9%
10-11 months	7%
1 year	19%
More than 1 year	2%
Not preset	7%

Note: Percentages add to more than 100 because more than one option could be chosen.

- Typically, a graduate who receives a full-time job offer before the end of the fellowship can terminate the fellowship without penalty. Generally, a minimum time requirement is not iron-clad, and the employer is well

aware of the circumstances under which the graduate is employed. However, providing reasonable notice if the fellow finds a job is a typical practice, generally directly between the fellow and the employer, rather than between the fellow and the school. Not surprisingly, the fellow can expect to forgo any hourly pay or stipend remaining on their fellowship, or to return a prorated portion of the stipend if the stipend was paid in a lump sum, so that funds can be reallocated. Alternatively, the employer can be asked to return unused funds.

- Comments on fellowship length revealed a variety of practices. Some schools noted a minimum hours requirement (assuming, as noted previously, that the fellowship runs its full course), and the time span over which those hours are met can vary depending on the timeline arranged between the employer and the fellow. There may nonetheless be a final deadline by which the hours must be completed. Some schools noted that fellowship extensions may be granted — e.g., month-to-month, for 10 weeks, or 3 months — for fellows who have not obtained full-time legal employment and who have demonstrated continued active job search activities.
- As to when fellowships are obtained, just over half of schools reported that they are obtained after graduation. Most of the rest reported that they are obtained in a mix of before and after graduation.
- Commentary on when fellowships start indicates that rolling start dates are most typical, with that time period usually starting no earlier than August (or after bar results) and sometimes later, such as November or December following graduation. Some schools noted a single start month, anywhere from September to January following graduation. A few schools indicated that fellowships can start any time after graduation, and a few described having two distinct start cycles, such as before and after bar results, or September and January.
- Just a few schools, 7%, reported that they required bar passage to participate in the program.
- About one-third of schools indicated that graduates may be considered for a second fellowship but often under specific circumstances, some of which have been noted above. For example, a second fellowship may be possible if the first placement does not result in a permanent job or is less than satisfactory and a second opportunity has more potential. A few schools noted that a second opportunity is available if, for some reason, the employer becomes unable to accommodate a fellow. Some schools said that a fellow may switch employers without necessarily receiving additional funding. In one case, graduates may apply for both a post-graduation and a post-bar fellowship.

- Just over half of schools reported that their fellows work part-time; 37% said they work full-time, and the few remaining reported that the split is about even. Comments indicated that the fellowships are designed to provide part-time work specifically so that graduates have time to continue their job hunt activities. Consistent with other commentary, mutual understanding between the employer and graduate is key; for example the required hours may be met on a mutually agreed to schedule and timetable.
- Fellows are most often paid on a stipend basis; two-thirds reported paying fellows a stipend, and one-third reported paying them on an hourly basis.
- For those schools paying on an hourly basis, nearly all paid each of their fellows the same hourly rate. Reported hourly rates ranged from \$10 per hour to \$38 per hour, though nearly half the reported hourly rates were in the \$15-20 per hour range.

## Stipends

For those schools paying their fellows a stipend, most, but not all, reported that each fellow receives the same stipend amount. Schools most commonly pay stipends on a monthly basis (43%). About one-quarter pay a lump sum, and one-third pay on some other basis. For stipends paid on some other basis, descriptions provided suggest that two payments are most typical: one near the beginning or halfway through the fellowship, and one upon completion or verification of hours worked. Payments on a bi-weekly or twice-a-month basis were also noted, as was a quarterly payment, and an option for either a lump sum or quarterly payment. As **Table 2** shows, monthly sti-

**Table 2. Monthly Stipends**

Range of stipend amounts	\$417 - 3,666
Median amount	\$1,225
Average amount	\$1,558
Distribution (% of stipend amounts in each range)*	
\$750 or less	8.3%
\$1,000	37.5%
\$1,200 – 1,800	25.0%
\$2,000 – 3,666	29.2%
# of stipend amounts reported	24

\* The ranges in the distribution portion of the table are not adjacent because the ranges are based on reported stipend amounts.

pend amounts (which schools were asked to report regardless of payment frequency) varied a great deal.

- Fellows' paychecks were most often issued by the law school (58%), followed by the parent university (37%). A few schools reported that the employer or the law school foundation (or similar entity) issued the paychecks (12% and 9%, respectively). Percentages add to more than 100 because more than one choice could be checked.
- It is more common, for tax purposes, for fellows to receive a Form 1099 (58% of schools) than to receive a W-2 (42% of schools).
- Just 11% of schools reported that fellows could enroll in their school's health care plan at any cost.

## Funding Levels

Of the schools reporting a bridge-to-practice program, 32 were able to report the total amount of funding for their Class of 2011 fellows. As in **Table 3**, funding levels varied widely, and although higher funding amounts generally correlate with larger numbers of fellows funded, this is not always the case. Collectively these schools provided almost \$8.5 million in bridge-to-practice fellowship funding. Among schools whose program had been in place at least two years in 2011, just over half reported that funding for the program had increased since its inception. Among the rest, the number who indicated that the funding had stayed about the same only slightly outnumbered those who indicated that the funding had decreased (25% compared with 20%). However, the commentary revealed a variety of circumstances underlying these figures. For example, some schools noted increased participation, even as funding remained relatively constant. Some have experienced both increased funding and increased participation. In some cases

**Table 3. Total Funding for Class of 2011 (per school)**

Range of funding	\$8,400 - 1,463,700
25th percentile	\$82,500
Median	\$175,000
75th percentile	\$346,500
Average	\$265,359

funding for the Class of 2011 decreased, and for 2012 there was even less or none. Also noted was a drop in funding for 2011, followed by an increase in 2012.

- In response to a question about sources of funding for their program, the most common source reported was the law school's operating budget (67%), followed by an outside grant (such as a dedicated alumni gift or foundation grant) at 40%, and an endowment or other restricted funds at 33%. A few schools indicated an "other" funding source, such as other university non-restricted funds, the dean's discretionary fund, and SBA supplemental funding. (Percentages add to more than 100 because more than one funding source could be reported.)
- Most schools (70%) require some type of report back from fellows during and/or at the conclusion of the fellowship. Commentary on the kind of reporting required revealed a wide variety of practices. For example, many schools require fellows to meet with their career counselor on a regular basis and to submit reports regularly, either in writing or via telephone. A report on job search activities may be required as part of the report. Some schools require timesheets signed by the supervising attorney. Some schools noted that they survey fellows at the end of their fellowship. Some ask for a memo reflecting on their experience, or just ask that the graduates report at the end of the fellowship if they have a job or will need further CSO assistance.
- Of the 43 schools with a bridge-to-practice program, 37 were able to provide a count of fellowships awarded to graduates in their Class of 2011. Collectively, these 37 programs funded a total of 1,444 fellowships. The number of fellowships per school ranged from 1 to 111, with a median of 30 and an average of 38. Most figures were reported only once, that is, there was no "typical" or common program size. Four schools reported funding 15 fellows.
- Of the 37 schools reporting a total number of fellowships, 34 were also able to report their counts by type of employer. Not surprisingly, and consistent with other findings on the Class of 2011, nearly half (47.9%) of the 1,229 placements accounted for were with public interest organizations. Second were placements with government (30.2%), followed by judicial clerkships at 12.4%. Law firms accounted for 7.2%, and the remainder were in corporate or other settings.

## NALP: The Association for Legal Career Professionals

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### Bridge to Practice Programs – Follow-up Survey Results

March 2013

[See the original November 2012 research here](#)

#### Introduction

At the time NALP conducted its survey of law school bridge-to-practice programs, a number of schools agreed to participate in a follow-up interview to answer more in-depth questions on certain aspects of their program for the Class of 2011 and to provide employment outcomes for bridge-to-practice fellows from that class. This resulted in a total of 14 schools (out of the original 84 survey respondents, 46 schools reported having a bridge-to-practice fellowship program of some sort) participating in a follow-up interview.

The responses from those interviews are synthesized below. Though these schools span the country and include both private and public schools, these findings, particularly the employment outcomes, are more anecdotal than necessarily reflective of the much larger number of schools with such program. One surprising finding is that law schools did not necessarily track whether bridge-to-practice fellows were subsequently employed after the conclusion of the fellowship period if that point in time fell after February 15. As a result, there is not as much information – at least among these schools – on the status of fellows as of August 2012 (or about 15 months after a typical May graduation). While not required by NALP or the ABA, tracking this information is suggested as a best practice, as it provides a means to measure the effectiveness of bridge-to-practice programs in helping graduates obtain legal and law-related jobs.

NALP plans to conduct a second survey during the fall of 2013 on bridge-to-practice programs as implemented for the Class of 2012. This survey will focus primarily on employment outcomes for fellows as of February 15, 2013 and as of August 2013. We hope that more schools will participate in order to gain a better understanding of how widespread these programs are and of their effectiveness in helping graduates obtain long-term employment.

#### Findings –

##### *Post-Fellowship Employment*

1. A total of 11 schools were able to report on the employment status of their fellows as of February 15, 2012, and eight have some information on employment status as of August 2012, or about 15 months after the majority of this class graduated. Note that because some programs are structured to have more than one, or rolling, start dates, which may be after February 15th, the August figures include some individuals who started their fellowship after February 15, 2012.

As of February 15, the majority (60%) of the approximately 470 fellows accounted for were still in their fellowships. At some schools, all were. Most of the rest were employed in some way, though the exact nature of the employment was not always known. Where it was known, nearly all were with the fellowship employer or in a related position, with "related" defined as there being a connection between the kind of work done or the subject matter expertise in the fellowship and the new job. As of February 15, a few former fellows were engaging in other activities such as pursuing an LLM or in the Teach for America program.

As of August 2012, about one in ten fellows were still in their fellowships, about 60% were known to be employed, usually with the fellowship employer or in a related position, and a handful were either not employed or pursuing an LLM. The status of about one-quarter of the fellows at these eight schools was not known as of August 2012.

These findings on employment outcomes should not be extrapolated to the entire population of Class of 2011 graduates, over 1,700 of whom had a job funded by their law school, either a bridge-to-practice fellowship or an on-campus research fellow or similar position.

##### *Fellowships as Ongoing Programs with Future Funding*

2. All the schools participating in the follow-up calls about the Class of 2011 program continued their program for the Class of 2012, and have funded so far well over 500 fellows from that class. However, because not all schools have completed funding for that class, the number is likely to grow. Every school also expressed a desire to continue the program for the class of 2013, and in most cases, continuation of the program is a certainty, though the funding level may not be known, or the program is expected to continue and the funding will be known when the upcoming budget is announced. Some schools have started gauging interest on the part of 2013 graduates, while others have not yet announced the program to that class, though as a number of schools noted, students have come to expect it. A few schools explicitly noted that their bridge-to-practice program is a long-term commitment, especially in the public interest realm, and is a program that alumni like and that local employers in some cases have come to expect. (The latter finding could become a possible downside to these programs; to the extent that public interest organizations come to expect recent graduates to come along with funding, their inclination to hire new graduates in salaried positions may diminish.) There was some consensus that the fellowships function effectively as apprenticeships and serve as an effective leg-up for graduates pursuing public interest careers.

##### *No Consensus on Implementing Effective Report-Back Procedures*

3. The extent to which schools instituted some kind of required reporting back from the fellows varied greatly, from none, to any combination of monitoring including requirements to check in with the CSO via telephone, meet with a counselor over the course of

the fellowship, submit a final written report, and complete a survey or evaluation at the end of the fellowship. Some schools also implemented procedures to get feedback from the employers. Some schools, for instance, require periodic timesheets signed by the host supervisor. The perceived usefulness of the graduate report-back process, either for the school in terms of providing a program evaluation or in providing guidance for the fellow, or for the fellows in terms of obtaining a long-term job, varied considerably. Some schools reported that the procedures in place in were adequate, while others felt their procedures were inadequate. Some schools found the report-back process useful at least for gathering the 9-month ERSS information for NALP. Several schools noted that they had decided to make the feedback process more formal or structured for their 2012 fellows.

#### *Fellowship Programs Continue to Evolve*

4. Schools noted some additional changes to their program, either already implemented in 2012 or that are expected or under consideration for 2013. One change, as noted earlier, is adding more structure to the process by which fellows report back to the CSO over the course of the fellowship. Other changes noted include trying to streamline administration of the program to include making all the awards at once; requiring bar passage in the state where the fellowship is located; making the fellowships shorter; and supplementing graduate-identified opportunities with some identified by the school.

#### *Law School Funding Determined Year by Year*

5. For the most part, programs at schools participating in this follow-up survey were funded entirely or mostly from the law school's operating budget, or more specifically in some cases the "Dean's discretionary fund" within the operating budget. In some cases, there were reports of small portions of fellowship budgets coming from sources other than the operating budget, generally from alumni gifts or other outside grants. A few schools have funded their program with two more evenly balanced buckets, one being filled from the operating budget and the other from either outside grants or an endowment/restricted funds. Funding the program mostly or entirely from outside gifts is not common. Typically, funds are allotted for one class only.

#### *Student Funding Is Generally Non-Competitive*

6. The process by which students/graduates obtain fellowship funding is largely non-competitive in the sense that schools typically fund as many fellowships as needed. This is not to say, however, that there are no strings attached, nor is funding all comers necessarily a given going forward. At a minimum, some kind of application, registration, or declaration of interest in obtaining funding is required. Some schools require bar passage. At some schools, the graduate must have a position in hand, at which point the graduate is able to come back for funding. Clearly such a position must be law-related and the graduate may need to commit to a minimum number of hours to obtain funding. Requiring a graduate to certify that he/she has undertaken a thorough job search and have exhausted all job search resources does not appear to be typical of these programs.

#### *No Common Practice on Malpractice Insurance*

7. An inquiry about malpractice insurance for fellows revealed that it is provided by the host employer. However, a number of schools either did not know or noted that the issue had not really come up, at least in part because the fellows were not yet admitted attorneys.

#### *Some Schools Find Downsides*

8. A number of schools participating in this follow-up survey do not see any downsides to the program, despite the commitment of monetary and staff resources. In some cases, the bridge-to-practice program is expected to continue indefinitely, as the value of the program, particularly for graduates pursuing a public interest career, is uniformly recognized by employers, alumni, state and local bar associations and the larger community.

Some schools, however, noted some downsides. One is a certain sense of entitlement on the part of some students and the need to manage expectations, including the level of pay that can be expected. Related to this, the fact that the program exists may lead at least some 3Ls to think that a job search is less important than it actually is. At least one school noted that securing a fellowship seemed to cause some students to stop looking for subsequent employment. Also noted is that in some instances, employers have come to expect the free help and in fact want the graduates for longer periods of time than the fellowship can provide. Also, as noted above, some employers seem to have begun to prefer the free labor of fellows to the burden of hiring paid staff members from among the recent graduates. In addition, difficulty in securing placements with government agencies was noted because of employment issues related to insurance, unions and the like, and a general lack of understanding of how to work with an independent contractor.

Finally, from the outside looking in, these programs are still vulnerable to the critique that they exist solely for the purpose of getting employment numbers up for the "as of February 15" count, rather than as true apprenticeships that bridge to more permanent career developments. This is particularly true when schools fail to track ultimate employment outcomes following the end of the fellowship periods.