

# CAREER SERVICES

## *Staying Closely Connected to 2010 Law Grads*



The Class of 2010 is almost fully employed even though the class was caught squarely in the middle of a very difficult job market. This class entered law school in 2006-2007, when the legal job market was strong and expectations ran high, but when the economic crisis hit, jobs were not as plentiful and firms reduced salaries. Thanks to the Test Drive program and the school's efforts to stay closely connected with our 2010 grads, however, the Office of Career Services was able to report that over 95% of our graduates who were seeking employment were permanently employed six to nine months after graduation.

### **TEST DRIVE**

"Test Drive has been extremely helpful for our graduates," said Assistant Dean Karen Sargent. "Through the innovative Test Drive program, the law school gave legal employers a financial incentive to make an initial hiring decision. The law school funded a graduate's salary of \$3,500 for one month to an employer on a 'no strings attached' basis (i.e., allowing a 'Test Drive' of the

relationship) and would consider funding an additional month of employment for \$3,500 if, upon completion of the first month, the employer and graduate would like to continue the relationship toward long-term, full-time employment."

Test Drive proved to be very successful. Fifty graduates completed Test Drive employment, and forty-four of those accepted offers for permanent positions. The resulting jobs were with law firms and corporations in Texas, New York, California, Missouri, and Tennessee. Of the six graduates who were not hired permanently through Test Drive, only one did not receive a job offer, while four others secured jobs elsewhere and one received an offer of employment but declined.

### **SMU 2010 GRADS**

Despite the overall decrease in hiring by large firms nationwide, SMU Dedman Law continued to be ranked #27 in the country for sending the greatest proportion of graduates to National Law Journal (NLJ) 250 firms. In fact, 28%

of our graduates who entered private practice went to firms with more than 100 lawyers.

As expected, however, since more of our 2010 graduates took jobs with small firms, the median starting salary in private practice decreased to \$100,000, down from \$120,000 in 2009. The average starting salary in private practice for 2010 SMU grads fell about \$10,000 from last year's average of approximately \$103,000.

For 2010 SMU Law grads in private practice, the median starting salary was \$100,000 and the average starting salary was about \$93,000.

The median starting salary for all employed 2010 Dedman Law graduates across the various sectors—private practice, business, government, public interest, and academics—was \$75,000. The average starting salary overall was \$92,775.

The majority of the class –65.63%– went into private practice: 28% in firms over 100; 9% in mid-sized firms of 50-100; 20% in firms of 11 – 50; 40% in firms of 2-10; and 2% opened a solo practice.

"In spring 2011 we observed a noticeable turnaround in the job market. We've had more calls from firms posting jobs for law students and have seen more firms coming back for our fall 2011 recruiting programs," said Assistant Dean Sargent. "More firms are reaching out to third-year students for permanent positions, and we're seeing that the lateral market is even more active."

## PARTNER TO PRACTICE

The school's creative new Partner to Practice program, which was initiated in February 2010, was so successful that the school repeated the program during summer 2011. The program made a significant impact on students' ability to obtain legal experience by providing employers with an additional incentive to hire second-year SMU Dedman Law students. Under Partner to Practice, employers receive a dollar-for-dollar match of the amount they pay to any second-year summer law clerks: up to \$500 per week for a maximum of \$3500 per student, in the form of tuition remission for the student during the fall semester. The law school conducted an outreach campaign to area legal employers, describing the innovative incentive but making no request or expectation of permanent employment. Rather, Partner to Practice was marketed as a means to facilitate paid, summer legal employment opportunities in which students could gain experience and build relationships to better position themselves for post-graduate employment.

"The program has been a huge success," said Sargent. "Our office actively reached out to firms and companies to create 74 Partner to Practice opportunities (49 law firm, 21 corporate, 3 non-profits, and 1 government). Although employers were told that there was no expectation of permanent employment, several employers have let us know that they plan to hire full-time from Partner to Practice and others want their clerks to continue working during their third year of school on a part-time basis."

Director Steve Yeager, who is responsible for small firm and corporate development, added, "The program proved to be a great employer outreach tool. Several employers who had never posted opportunities with the law school before participated in Partner to Practice this year. We have developed new employer relationships that will benefit students in the future and strengthened our relationships with employers from last year."



"I worked on several projects during my Partner to Practice clerkship, including the NFL lockout, Superbowl XVL, and numerous employment law and non-subscriber issues. In total, it was a great experience! I will continue working for my Partner to Practice employer in the fall, with positive indications from associates, paralegals, and the managing partner, that a permanent position upon graduation is very likely!"

—Brett Chisum, Class of 2012 and McCathern Mooty Partner to Practice Summer 2011 Legal Clerk

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Student responses to Partner to Practice show how much they appreciate the support SMU Dedman School of Law is showing during these tough times.

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"My summer internship at iSIGHT went well this summer. I've become really interested in the area of computer law and cybersecurity, and I think I may be able to carve out a niche for myself in this practice. iSIGHT has offered to keep me employed part time during the school year, and I'm definitely going to take them up on that. I've also made some government contacts through iSIGHT that I believe may be very fruitful one day. I'm also getting some exposure to a patent and trademark protection practice, which fits my intellectual property interest well."

—Brady Frazier, Class of 2012 and iSIGHT Partner to Practice Summer 2010 Legal Intern

## NEW HOUSTON INTERVIEW PROGRAM & MOCK INTERVIEW MATCH

Test Drive and Partner to Practice are only two of a number of job development initiatives SMU Dedman Law has implemented since the downturn of the legal market. In addition, a new interview program – the Houston Interview Program – was created to increase employer hiring for students who ultimately desire to settle in Houston. Also Mock Interview Match, a program started in spring 2011, connects each participating student with an attorney from a firm that participates in our OCI program. This attorney conducts practice interviews with his or her student before fall recruiting.

## JUDICIAL OUTREACH

In the 2010-2011 academic year and summer 2011, SMU Dedman Law students experienced unprecedented access to judicial internships and externships, thanks to three new initiatives coordinated by the Office of Career Services and the expansion of two existing programs. In its inaugural year, the Federal Judicial Externship Course placed forty-five students in three-credit-hour, semester-long externships, including a classroom component, with federal judges in the United States District, Magistrate, and Bankruptcy courts for the Northern and Eastern Districts of Texas and in the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals. Summer 2011 also saw the debut of the Texas State Court Education Program with Justice Liz-Lang Miers of the Texas Fifth District Court of Appeals. The program is an intensive, three-week, two-credit-hour externship, also with a classroom component, providing another fifteen students with an insider's view to all local levels of the state court judiciary.

Summer 2011 also marked an all-time high in judicial internship placement for SMU Dedman Law students, due in part to a new joint initiative between the Office of Career Services and the Collin

County Young Lawyers Association. The new CCYLA Collin County Judicial Internship Program placed twelve students in internships with Collin County district court judges. A creatively structured and managed program, it won recognition in its first year from the Texas Young Lawyers Association. In another first, ten SMU Dedman Law students interned with United States Magistrate Judge Amos Mazzant in the Eastern District of Texas, Sherman Division, and many other students secured their own internships with judges around the state and country. Last, but not least, the Dallas Association of Young Lawyers, our longtime partner, placed twenty-nine students in internships with local Dallas state court judges.

The increased focus on judicial externship and internship experiences, uniquely available to SMU Dedman Law students due to the school's location in a major legal market with an abundance of federal and state

courts, has led to increased interest in applications for prestigious post-graduate judicial clerkships. Currently, eight 2010 SMU Dedman Law graduates serve as judicial clerks at every level of the Texas appellate court system, and in federal district and bankruptcy courts throughout Texas and Florida. Applications for 2012 positions by SMU Dedman Law students are on the rise.

## GOVERNMENT OUTREACH

The Office of Career Services also engaged in a personal outreach campaign to local, state, and federal government employers in the Dallas-Fort Worth area during the last school year to develop, maintain, and strengthen relationships with SMU Dedman School of Law. Using both webpage links and Hot Jobs & Opportunities Bulletins, Career Services increased marketing of ways to gain legal experience with government employers (both during and after law school) by directing

students to upcoming Government Honors and Internship deadlines. To better educate and inform students about governmental employment opportunities, Career Services presented twelve separate on-campus information sessions through its Government Practice Series. Representatives came from the U.S. Attorney's Office, the Public Defenders' Offices, the Department of Justice, the CIA, the FBI, the IRS, the Office of the Controller of the Currency, the Presidential Management Fellows Program, and Army and Air Force JAG, among others. In order to further develop relationships with these employers, Career Services will be hosting a Government Lawyers Reception in the fall of 2011, where government employers can meet students and explain about employment opportunities. The government employers will be encouraged to participate in Phase II of our On Campus Recruiting Program in October 2011. ■



### **Linda A. Hale**

*Director in the Office of  
Career Services*

## LINDA A. HALE NEW OCS DIRECTOR

Linda Hale joined SMU Dedman School of Law in December 2010 as a Director in the Office of Career Services. Linda leads the development of legal employment opportunities for the law school's students and recent graduates with federal, state, and local government agencies and with the judiciary. She also counsels students in their professional development and coaches them in their job searches. In addition, she works with Steve Yeager in the Career Services Office to develop opportunities with midsize and small firms.

Linda earned her Bachelor of Arts in Economics from Baylor University and her J.D. from Baylor Law School. While attending Baylor Law School, she was a member of the Order of the Barristers and of the Texas Championship Jessup International Moot Court Team, which placed third in the country in national competition. Upon law school graduation

in 1981, Linda joined Shank, Irwin in Dallas, becoming a litigation partner focusing on toxic tort, oil and gas, and complex commercial litigation. From 1990-1992, Linda served as Assistant University Counsel for SMU. For the next eighteen years, prior to joining SMU Dedman School of Law, Linda was Of Counsel to the Conant Whittenburg, Conant French & Chaney, and Clouse Dunn Khoshbin firms, handling business litigation, with a focus on plaintiffs' class action securities work, among other matters. From 2002-2006, Linda also served as an Associate Municipal Judge for the City of Dallas. Linda is a member and Life Fellow of the Dallas Bar Association, Sustaining Member of Attorneys Serving the Community, Fellow of the Texas Bar Association, and has been AV rated by Martindale-Hubbell as a practicing lawyer for more than twenty years. ■